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Chapter 1

Nightpaw ran, adrenaline guiding her paws forward. She could hear the sound of the monster churning up the moorland behind her, and the shriek of a cat as they fell victim to it's merciless paws. No cat should have to die like that, without anybody able to sit vigil for them. But there wasn't time. If Nightpaw didn't hurry up, she'd be next.

She nearly slipped as the ground started to rapidly dip into the hollow known as Fourtrees. But there wasn't four trees there anymore. Flames flickered at the edges of the branches, engulfing the leaves as if they had never been there in the first place. Twolegs stood around the trees, watching in glee as ThunderClan's territory, the forest, went up in flames.

ShadowClan and RiverClan weren't doing much better either. They obviously couldn't set RiverClan territory on fire - it was too wet - but they did send similar monsters that they had sent to WindClan to churn up the ground there as well. As for ShadowClan, well that was turning into an orange and grey haze as it was being eating up by even more flames.

Nightpaw backed into the hollow, danger approaching from all sides. She felt her black tail brush against something behind her. The Great Rock. She gulped. It was the end.

Her life was too short to end this soon but, if it was StarClan's wish to take her along with all the other Clan cats, then so be it. But she had a feeling that StarClan didn't want this. Nightpaw had always been told that StarClan were the mighty ancestors that lived in the sky and saved the Clan cats on numerous occasions. So why would they want the Clans to be wiped out? A thought suddenly struck her. StarClan can't control Twolegs. And it's Twolegs who are doing this. She hissed, narrowing her eyes at the oddly shaped creatures who had the power of fire. She wouldn't go down without a fight.

Nightpaw bunched her muscles underneath her, preparing herself

for her last run, her last fight that she was ever going to have. She froze when she heard something behind her.

"Psst, over here!" She spotted the source of the noise: a calico tom perched on top of the Great Rock.

"There is literally no point in being quiet!" Nightpaw yowled back over the sound of the monsters. "The Twolegs are too mouse brained to notice us anyway!"

The calico tom didn't seem to have an answer to that.

"Well I'm going to show these Twolegs the almighty power of WindClan because I'm going to die anyway, so I might as well do it on my own terms," she growled, flexing her claws as she prepared to go again.

"Hold on. Wouldn't it be a better idea to escape? Then you at least have a better chance of living," the tom pointed out. "It's not like you're going to do much damage anyway - you're only an apprentice."

Nightpaw inwardly sighed. He had a good point about that last part - what could an apprentice do?

"You're one to talk - you look like an apprentice as well," she snapped back.

"We could escape and actually survive," he meowed back, his voice fading as the monsters started closing in.

"Escape where?" Nightpaw shot back before plunging into battle.

She launched herself at the nearest Twolegs, knocking the strange fire maker out of it's paw. It landed in ThunderClan territory, but there was nothing that wasn't ablaze already. The Twoleg was frozen for a few seconds, clearly unable to register the fact that a cat had just jumped on it out of nowhere. It quickly recovered though, grabbing her pelt and flinging it threw the air.

Nightpaw landed amongst the flames of ThunderClan territory, which were still persistently going. Her leg felt sore, but not broken,

and she saw the fire coming closer. The black she cat sprang up as a nearby leaf burst into flames. She had her paw on that only a few moments ago. She scanned the forest, looking for a gap in the fire. There was only one, and it led to the hollow that used to be Fourtrees. It looked like she had to go into battle again.

She sprang forward just as the flames closed behind her and located the Twoleg that had flung her over there in the first place. Her leg gave a little twinge of pain but she ignored it. She was out to get her revenge and was going to get it. Nightpaw jumped up, not as high as she would have liked due to her injured leg, and dragged her claws down the Twoleg's back, hearing a satisfying howl of pain.

She dropped back onto her paws, the pain in her leg a lot more intense than it was been before. And her vision was .. blurrier. She shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. Her vision probably just *seemed* blurry because of all the smoke clouding her vision.

The Twoleg tried to grab her again with it's large paw, but she was prepared this time. She jumped over it, giving it a quick bite and looking for where she should hit next. Nightpaw wasn't prepared for the fact that it could use both paws at once with ease and she was roughly shook by the other Twoleg paw.

The Twoleg lifted her up so that she was eye level with it. It looked angry. It was shaking her around and shouting something that she didn't understand. Suddenly, she was flying through the air and the last thing she felt was her head make contact with the Great Rock.

Chapter 2

Nightpaw opened her eyes, noting the constant thumping in her head. That probably wasn't a good sign. A rock cavern rose up around her and she was sitting on the bare, stone floor. This wasn't the WindClan medicine den. There would actually be nests, for a start. She tried to remember what had happened. Had she accidently tripped over and banged her head? No, that wasn't it. And then it came to her. The panic, the monsters, the Twolegs. Nightpaw tried to scramble up, but fell back down again.

"Oh, she's awake!" She heard a slightly familiar voice meow.

"Finally," a tom said.

"Blizzardpaw, we can do without the attitude," a she cat who was fairly close by snapped.

Nightpaw lifted her head slightly, seeing that the she cat was sitting directly in front of her.

"Hi, I'm Dawnpaw. You took a nasty bang to your head there and inhaled quite a lot of smoke and your leg was sprained," the cinnamon silver tabby she cat meowed breathlessly.

"Umm.. ok. That doesn't sound too good," Nightpaw replied, still drowsy.

"Actually, you seem to be healing fine. Just take it easy the next few days and you'll be better soon," Dawnpaw meowed after sniffing her leg.

"Where are we?" Nightpaw asked.

"We found a tunnel that led from the edge of Fourtrees on the WindClan side to a cavern we think is underneath the Great Rock," the cat whose voice she seemed to recognise piped up.

"Oh it's you," Nightpaw groaned when she saw the calico tom who

had tried to stop her going into battle before.

"You could at least try to sound a bit happy to see me," the calico tom meowed, a trace of hurt in his voice.

"Oh sorry. I just meant you were... recognisable?" Nightpaw meowed, trying to say something that wouldn't offend the tom anymore.

"I guess calico toms *are* pretty rare," the tom conceded. "I'm Emberpaw by the way, from ShadowClan."

"Well, you *used* to be ShadowClan," the other tom, Blizzardpaw, grumbled.

"I can see you're a ray of sunshine," Nightpaw said sarcastically, looking over at the long furred light grey tabby tom crouched in the corner.

"Unfortunately we're stuck with him. We're the only survivors," Dawnpaw meowed.

"Yeah, because everyone else is dead," Blizzardpaw said bluntly.

There was no response. Everyone was wrapped up in their own thoughts about their families, friends and mentors.

"Surely the leaders are still alive. They have nine lines, for StarClan's sake!" Nightpaw broke the silence.

"They *had* nine lives , you mean," Blizzardpaw corrected.

"They were pretty old, they were probably on their last lives anyway," Emberpaw said, ignoring Blizzardpaw's comment.

"What clan are you from?" Nightpaw asked, looking back over at Dawnpaw.

"I'm ThunderClan's medicine cat in training," Dawnpaw meowed proudly. "And don't you dare say 'was' Blizzardpaw."

Blizzardpaw muttered something under his breath as Nightpaw

tried to stand up again.

"I'm going to look for survivors," Nightpaw said, looking for the exit.

"There's no point - we've already checked," Blizzardpaw replied.

"Well I'll go and look for some prey then, there's got to be *something* we can eat," Nightpaw meowed, heading towards the tunnel near where Emberpaw was sitting.

"I'll come as well - it's dangerous out there and there's safety in numbers," Emberpaw said, flicking his tail and standing up.

"Me and Blizzardpaw will go too," Dawnpaw decided, following Nightpaw to the tunnel.

"Fine," Blizzardpaw growled before they all headed out.

Nightpaw squinted in the bright daylight, her eyes adjusting to the sudden change in lighting. WindClan territory was spread out before her, but it wasn't the moor she was used to. All of the ground was churned up into mud and huge Twoleg monsters could be seen in the distance.

"M-my home," Blizzardpaw's voice cracked with emotion as he gazed in the direction of RiverClan's territory.

"Me and Blizzardpaw will go and search ThunderClan territory and Nightpaw and Emberpaw can go and search ShadowClan," Dawnpaw decided. "And let's hope we can find some prey."

Nightpaw headed into ShadowClan after Emberpaw, who knew the way. The ground was covered in a fine coating of ash and the trees were bare and leafless, allowing light to reach every part of the ground. It was definitely very different from the ShadowClan territory she had heard about - it used to be dark and mysterious, it's secrets only known to ShadowClan cats.

Nightpaw looked ahead at Emberpaw, wondering how he was feeling being in his old territory. She didn't think she would be able to go back to her old territory, not after what the Twolegs had done

to it.

She froze as she heard the sound of Twolegs smashing a hard object against the brittle trees.

"Twolegs! Quick, hide!" Nightpaw exclaimed.

"Twolegs are exactly what we're looking for," Emberpaw murmured, darting towards the huge monster behind the Twolegs.

"What!? Why?" She hissed, hurrying after Emberpaw.

"All of the prey here have died - we've already checked - so we need to try some... unconventional methods to not starve," Emberpaw meowed, before crouching down and sneaking past the Twolegs.

Nightpaw followed, her black pelt blending in with the desolate landscape behind her. She eventually reached the huge monster and started behind it, finding Emberpaw crouched next to a pile of Twoleg scraps.

"Where did you get those from?" Nightpaw asked, slightly mortified by the fact she was going to have to eat Twoleg food.

"Inside the monster," Emberpaw replied, flicking his tail to where there was a high up opening in the monster.

"You want me to eat Twoleg scraps?" She meowed, sniffing them cautiously.

"Yes, unless you want to starve. They're quite tasty anyway," Emberpaw said before picking some up and bounding back towards where they had came from.

Nightpaw hesitated before picking the rest up and, after getting past the Twolegs, ran to catch Emberpaw up.

"I'll race you!" She said as she passed him, voice slightly muffled from the scraps she held in her jaws.

"Oh, come on! That's not even fair! How am I meant to win against a WindClan cat?" Emberpaw meowed before chasing after her.

They met Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw in the cavern and spread out the scraps they had managed to get before tucking in.

"It's all right but not as good as a freshly caught rabbit," Nightpaw meowed through bites.

"Well you better get used to it because you're probably never going to eat a rabbit ever again," Blizzardpaw growled.

"This is what I've had to put up with all day," Dawnpaw said, flicking her tail towards Blizzardpaw.

"Are we going to live the rest of our lives here though?" Nightpaw asked. "Our territories have been taken over by Twolegs, so there's not much point in staying."

"We'll have to wait for direction from StarClan before making a move," Dawnpaw decided. "For now, we should get some sleep."

They all huddled up in a corner for warmth, Blizzardpaw muttering something under his breath, before falling asleep.

Chapter 3

Nightpaw woke to an excited mew coming from Emberpaw.

"Dawnpaw! Did you get a dream from StarClan last night?" Emberpaw mewed.

"No," Dawnpaw replied, her tail drooping.

"You'd think they at least have a spare cat that could be bothered to send us a message - a lot more cats have joined their ranks now," Blizzardpaw growled, his fur ruffled from sleep.

"If StarClan won't come to us, then we'll just go to them," Nightpaw said, giving her fur a quick groom.

"So how do you want us to get there? Die?" Blizzardpaw muttered.

"No, we can go to the Moonstone." Nightpaw replied, rolling her eyes at the comment.

"Great idea! Let's go there now!" Emberpaw meowed excitedly, hopping up and starting towards the tunnel.

"Not so fast, Emberpaw. We should probably eat something first," Dawnpaw said, nodding to the pile of scraps left from the day before.

After quickly devouring the rest of the scraps, they headed out. Dawnpaw led the way, as she had been to the Moonstone before, and Nightpaw trailed behind. Around her, what used to be her home, the moor, was a churned up mess of mud. There was the acrid stench of Twoleg monsters in her nose, so unlike the fresh, heather smell that had occupied the moor beforehand.

"We better hurry up. It's very exposed out here and the Twolegs will spot us easily," Nightpaw called from the back of the group, quickening her pace so that she fell in step with Dawnpaw in front.

"When will we arrive at the Moonstone?" Nightpaw asked, trying to distract herself from the moor around her.

"Probably just before sunset, so we will be able to get some rest before going into Mothermouth," Dawnpaw explained. "I would have prepared travelling herbs for us all but everything was destroyed - even the ThunderClan herb store."

Nightpaw and Dawnpaw continued talking in the front of the group whilst Emberpaw tried, and failed, to get a smile out of Blizzardpaw in the back. Dawnpaw tried to tell Emberpaw that she thought it was impossible for Blizzardpaw to crack a smile but Emberpaw was undeterred. He still managed to get a few laughs from the two she cats though.

Just before sunset, Dawnpaw stopped in front of a gaping hole in the side of a mountain. Mothermouth.

"Here we are," Dawnpaw announced.

"We should get some rest," Nightpaw meowed, scanning the area for a safe place to rest and spotting a large stone platform that would fit all four of them on.

"Can't we hunt? I'm starving," Blizzardpaw complained, scenting the air for prey.

"There's probably enough time for both. As long as we're at the Moonstone by moonlight, I'm fine with whatever we do," Dawnpaw shrugged.

Nightpaw looked at Emberpaw, who hadn't spoken yet. "What do you vote for?"

"I've got admit that I'm sorting of hungry as well," Emberpaw meowed sheepishly, acting like it was against the Warrior Code to agree with Blizzardpaw.

They headed into a nearby forest, alert for any signs of prey

"A mouse!" Emberpaw hissed, just as the smell of mouse hit her nostrils.

"Over there," Nightpaw whispered, flicking her tail to where a mouse was burrowing through the leaves.

She looked around for Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw but they were nowhere to be seen.

"You should hunt it, I'm used to hunting on the moor," Nightpaw meowed, stepping back.

"We can hunt it together - you go behind the mouse, making sure to keep downwind, and I'll chase it into your paws," Emberpaw said.

Nightpaw nodded, slinking through the trees and crouching behind the mouse. She made eye contact with Emberpaw, who gave a slight twitch of his tail before pouncing. The mouse scrambled away, right into her paws. She gave it a swift bite to the neck.

Thank you StarClan for this prey, Nightpaw thought silently before picking it up and heading over to Emberpaw.

"Nice catch," he meowed, nodding to the mouse.

"I wouldn't have been able to do it without your help," she replied, before adding "although teamwork isn't usually ShadowClan's style, is it?"

"I like to do things my way," Emberpaw replied, flicking his tail. "Anyway, it doesn't matter what Clan we come from anymore."

"I think you've been spending too much time with Blizzardpaw," she teased before heading back in the direction of Mothermouth.

They shared the mouse and Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw shared a thrush that they managed to catch before getting some rest. It was moonhigh when Nightpaw woke up. She prodded Emberpaw with a claw.

"Wake up sleepyhead, it's moonhigh," she whispered before going to wake the others.

When they were all awake, Dawnpaw led the way into Mothermouth. Nightpaw started getting increasingly uneasy as the

tunnel started closing in around her, blocking any access to the sky. She focused on the rhythm of her pawsteps, ignoring the feeling of being trapped.

"We're here," Dawnpaw whispered as she stepped out into a large cavern.

"*This* is the Moonstone. I can't see-" Blizzardpaw was cut off as a small opening in the ceiling allowed the moons light to shine on a giant rock that sat in front of them.

Nightpaw narrowed her eyes against the light; the stone was glimmering so much that it was almost overwhelming. Everyone was gazing at the Moonstone in similar awe until Dawnpaw spoke up.

"Everyone, take your places at the Moonstone and touch your nose to it," she instructed, her green eyes glittering in the light.

Nightpaw crouched down next to Blizzardpaw at one side of the Moonstone before closing her eyes and touching her nose to it.

She was suddenly in WindClan territory again, what it used to be like, looking out over the moor with the mountains behind her. She felt a clench in her heart as she looked at what her home used to be like. Before it was destroyed.

She tried to turn her head to look in the direction of the mountains, but found that she couldn't. She was stuck facing away from them, towards ThunderClan territory and the Twolegplace beyond.

"Have you ever wondered what is out there?" A v oice murmured in her ear.

"Find the place where the trees stand in even the worst floods. Find the place that no Twolegs can destroy. Find the place where there is silver in all seasons. And along the way, find the cats who you can trust."

Chapter 4

Nightpaw woke from her dream, quivering next to a sleeping Blizzardpaw. It wasn't the voice that had scared her - how else would the prophecy had been given to her? It was who the voice belonged to. Her parents both died when she was a kit but there was one cat she had always been close to. Her mentor.

"Are you ok?" Dawnpaw asked. "It can be scary, the first time."

"Yeah, I'm fine. Did you get the prophecy as well?" Nightpaw said, quickly changing the topic.

"Yes. So did Emberpaw," the tabby she cat replied.

Nightpaw looked around the now dimly lit cavern, not seeing the apprentice's distinguishable calico pelt anywhere.

"He went outside for some fresh air," Dawnpaw explained.

Before Nightpaw could reply, Blizzardpaw woke up next to her.

"Now how are a bunch of apprentices meant to do that and survive?" Blizzardpaw asked in his usual grumpy way.

"I hear you have a lot of faith in us," Nightpaw muttered, just loud enough for Dawnpaw to hear.

Dawnpaw twitched her whiskers in amusement before leading the way out of the cavern. Nightpaw felt a sense of elation as she felt a slight breeze ruffle her whiskers, telling her she was nearly out.

As Nightpaw stepped out into the daylight, she saw Emberpaw heading towards the group with two plump mice in his jaws.

"Hi Emberpaw. Did you get the prophecy as well?" She asked.

"Yep," he replied, placing the mice on the ground. "We can talk about it whilst we eat."

They discussed about the prophecy whilst tucking into the mice, deciding that StarClan was probably trying to tell them to find something beyond the Twolegplace next to ThunderClan territory. They set off just before sunhigh, managing to reach ThunderClan territory at sunset.

"We can probably rest in ThunderClan camp. I checked yesterday and the Twolegs were working on the other side of the territory. The camp should be intact enough to rest for the night," Dawnpaw meowed, trotting off in what Nightpaw presumed was the direction of the camp.

ThunderClan territory looked the same as ShadowClan: ash coated and desolate with bare, twiggy trees. It was a shadow of it's former glory. Nightpaw dug her claws into the ground. Why did the Twolegs have to do this? A Clan used to thrive here and now... It was nothing more than a wasteland. She looked around at the group, noticing that Blizzardpaw and Emberpaw clearly felt the same. Blizzardpaw's tail was lashing angrily and Emberpaw had his claws unsheathed. She couldn't see Dawnpaw's face but, from the fact that her shoulders were stiff and she was walking as quickly as possible, Nightpaw figured that she felt the same, probably even angrier.

Dawnpaw stopped as a ravine came into view.

"Even the Twolegs can't destroy the ravine," Dawnpaw muttered, a sense of pride in her voice as she reflected on ThunderClan's excellent choice of camp.

They followed Dawnpaw down the ravine, hopping over loose stones and debris from trees that had fallen down in the fire.

"Are you sure this is safe?" Blizzardpaw said, watching the stones clatter onto the ground several fox lengths below them.

"Of course it is! Warriors have went up and down this path for-" Dawnpaw was cut off as Blizzardpaw suddenly jerked forward.

All Nightpaw saw a tumble of grey tabby fur as it slipped toward the darkness below them. It all went in slow motion as Emberpaw

scrambled towards Blizzardpaw, trying to catch him as he fell towards the void. But he missed.

Suddenly, Blizzardpaw stopped, floating in mid air. His mouth was open, ready for a final shriek and he quickly closed it. His long grey fur was wrapped around a fallen branch, but the branch was slowly bending under his weight. Nightpaw quickly hooked a claw into his pelt, dragging him back up to solid ground.

"Don't do that again," Nightpaw mewed, still trying to process what had just happened.

"I'm not planning on it," Blizzardpaw growled, trying to smooth down the fur that had gotten caught on the branch.

"I'll check you over when we reach the camp," Dawnpaw informed Blizzardpaw, before turning and heading towards the tunnel that was only a few tail lengths away.

"At least you don't have any chance of falling anymore - the entrance is right there," Emberpaw said optimistically, gesturing with his tail the direction of the camp.

Nightpaw pushed her way through the narrow tunnel, taking in the sight of the destroyed camp around her. There was no dens, they had probably been consumed by the fire, except the medicine den, which was made of the rock of the side of the camp.

"Surely there must be herbs left in the herb store - they would have been protected from the fire," Nightpaw meowed, glancing at Dawnpaw.

"That's what I thought was strange. There was not trace of the herbs or the nests that used to be there but they couldn't have burned," Dawnpaw mused. "The only reason there would be any left is if a cat took them."

"When did you start searching for survivors?" Nightpaw asked, a thought occuring to her.

"A day after the fire. We had to let it all settle down first," Dawnpaw replied.

"There could be survivors!" Emberpaw meowed, his eyes glimmering with hope. "They probably thought nobody else would live and left before we could find them!"

"That's impossible," Blizzardpaw pointed out. "The only cats that would have the initiative to go and get herbs and know what to do with them would be the medicine cats, and they *would* bother checking if anyone was left."

However much she hated to admit it, Blizzardpaw had a point. There was something fishy about the entire situation.

"We can rest in the medicine den and investigate in the morning," Nightpaw decided, heading towards the only den left.

"Good idea," Emberpaw said, following in her pawsteps.

They curled up on the dry mud of the medicine den after Dawnpaw had checked Blizzardpaw over. It wasn't as comfortable as the nest she used to have in WindClan, but it was better than nothing. She shook her head.

You're turning into Blizzardpaw, Nightpaw scolded herself, but she knew deep down that there was no hope of reclaiming WindClan, or any of the other Clans, territories.

Chapter 5

Nightpaw woke up to the sound of excited mews coming from outside the ThunderClan medicine den. She scrambled up, giving her fur a quick groom, before squeezing through the entrance and looking around the camp. Dawnpaw had Emberpaw, who's fur was fluffed up with feigned terror, pinned to the ground. Blizzardpaw was watching the two play fight, occasionally shouting comments from the sidelines.

"Emberpaw, you're too soft on her!" The grey tabby tom shouted.

"No I'm not!" Emberpaw shouted back. "She's just really good!"

Nightpaw sidled up to Blizzardpaw as the other two started playing fighting again.

"It's called confidence building," she whispered in his ear, twitching her whiskers as he leapt back.

"Where did you come from!?" He exclaimed, causing the play fight to stop as Dawnpaw checked out what was going on.

"The ThunderClan medicine den," Nightpaw answered.

"Well, obviously you did!" He growled back.

"Why did you ask then?" Nightpaw shot back.

"Ok, ok. Everybody stop arguing," Dawnpaw said, waving her slightly dishevelled tail.

"Why don't you fight against Dawnpaw now, Blizzardpaw?" Emberpaw asked.

"Fine," Blizzardpaw growled. "I'll show you how it's done."

As Blizzardpaw trotted off, Emberpaw sat down, wrapping his tail neatly over his paws. Nightpaw sat next to him, watching with

interest as Blizzardpaw got ready to show Dawnpaw 'how it's done'.

"We've been teaching Dawnpaw how to fight whilst you've been sleeping. Anyone would think you're hibernating!" Emberpaw joked.

"Yeah, I find it hard sleeping in new places," she said, studying her paws.

Technically she was telling the truth, but that wasn't the main reason she was tired. The main reason was that she had been having nightmares about the Twolegs destroying the territories again but she didn't tell Emberpaw that.

"It can be hard trying to sleep in a new place," the calico tom meowed, his amber eyes glowing with sympathy.

She suddenly felt incredibly bad that she had sort of lied to this cat who was actually quite nice.

"How is Dawnpaw doing with her training then?" Nightpaw asked, changing the subject.

"She's doing quite well, considering she's a medicine cat apprentice," Emberpaw replied.

Nightpaw narrowed her eyes doubtfully as Blizzardpaw pinned her down with ease once again, the tabby she cat not even making much of an effort to shove him off.

"Really?" Nightpaw asked, wondering if Emberpaw genuinely thought Dawnpaw was doing well or if he was just being nice. Knowing Emberpaw, it was probably both.

"Yeah; of course Blizzardpaw is better than her - he's had an extra six moons training," Emberpaw replied, not having any doubt whatsoever in Dawnpaw's fighting skill.

Nightpaw glanced at the sky, noticing that it was nearly sunhigh. She stood up and stretched, enjoying the feeling of the warm sun on her back. It almost felt like she was at home again, having fun with her friends. Almost.

"We should probably investigate the ThunderClan medicine den," Nightpaw said decisively.

"Why would we need to do that?" Emberpaw asked, titling his head.

"Because all the herbs are gone, remember?" Nightpaw said impatiently, starting towards the medicine den.

"Ohhh, I remember now!" Emberpaw replied, bounding towards her.

They searched the entire den but couldn't find any signs of who, or what, stole the herbs.

"There's not even any scent," Nightpaw sighed after searching for a few minutes, "come on, let's go get the others."

She trotted out of the den, seeing that Dawnpaw and Blizzardpaw were still fighting. There was a clear winner - the grey tabby tom had the she cat pinned down to the ground once more.

"Everyone come over here," Nightpaw said, gesturing towards her with her tail.

Blizzardpaw stopped his fight with Dawnpaw, glancing up and releasing some of the pressure on Dawnpaw, who he had pinned down. Dawnpaw took this opportunity and knocked her opponent off her, clumsily pinning him down.

"Get off," Blizzardpaw muttered, batting her away with ease. "That wasn't fair."

When she finally had the group assembled, Nightpaw explained how they should probably quickly scavenge and then set off across the Twolegplace. They all agreed, even Blizzardpaw, who grumbled a response but they chose to take it as a 'yes'.

After a quick and very successful scavenge, they shared the scraps and started heading towards the Twolegplace.

"You do know where it is, don't you?" Nightpaw checked.

"Of course I do," Dawnpaw replied," this was my home."

They continued walking in silence until they reached a tall wooden fence that loomed up above them. They each leaped up, claws scrambling for a pawhold on the smooth surface, before pulling themselves up. The four apprentices stood in a line, balanced precariously on the fence and turning back to look at what was once their homes.

ThunderClan and ShadowClan had became mere ashes. RiverClan and WindClan had been torn up by huge monsters. Even Fourtrees was now destroyed.

"We will never be able to defend our territories or spend time with our Clanmates ever again," Blizzardpaw yowled, his voice echoing off the silent, bare trees.

"We are each other's Clanmates now," Nightpaw said softly. "We need to keep the memory of the Clans alive."

Chapter 6

Nightpaw turned around, instead looking at the Twoleg territories ahead of her. There was a small patch of grass in front of her but a Twoleg nest at the end of the grass completely blocked her view of anything beyond.

"Let's go!"Emberpaw meowed enthusiastically, preparing to jump down.

"Wait!" Dawnpaw said.

Emberpaw tried to stop, but he was already half tilting towards the ground, so instead resulted in landing as a heap of fur on the grass below.

"What is it?" He called up, getting to his paws and shaking his pelt.

"I smell herbs," Dawnpaw replied, opening her mouth slightly to let the scent wash over her scent glands.

"You made Emberpaw fall into a heap on the ground for that?" Blizzardpaw growled.

"Yes," Dawnpaw said cooly. "There shouldn't the smell of dock here: Twolegs only grow sweet smelling herbs."

Nightpaw had no idea what dock was, but she presumed it was a herb that wasn't very nice smelling.

"How do you know that?" Blizzardpaw growled, being difficult once again. "Have I been talking to a kittypet this entire time?"

"No, you haven't. If you must know, Nightfall told me," Dawnpaw replied, starting to get agitated.

Nightfall was the ThunderClan medicine cat, so would have been Dawnpaw's mentor. Nightpaw remembered seeing him briefly at gatherings but she had never talked to the tuxedo tom herself.

"Where do you think the smell is coming from then?" Nightpaw asked, swiftly diverting the conversation away from the argument it was about to turn into.

"Well, it smells like it is coming from ThunderClan territory-" Dawnpaw was cut off as Blizzardpaw spoke again.

"You mean *used* to be ThunderClan-" Blizzardpaw was cut off by Dawnpaw.

"Shut up!" She snapped.

Nightpaw had only known Dawnpaw for a short amount of time, but had pretty much figured that the tabby she cat didn't have much of a temper. It was probably Blizzardpaw mentioning Nightfall that contributed the most to her losing her patience; Dawnpaw would have had a close bond with her mentor. Like Nightpaw used to have...

Nightpaw shook her head, trying to push down any thoughts of Breezeflight that she might have, but her attempts were in vain. She was dragged into a memory as emotions and events that she had tried to shut away in an attempt to stay level headed flooded into her brain.

Nightpaw crouched next to her parents' bodies, her nose pushed into the tabby fur of Timberdash, her father. Wounds oozing blood crisscrossed the bodies, and Nightpaw had a thin layer of redness coating her paws from crouching next to them. She heard a cat approaching and pulled away. It was a dilute tortoiseshell, her yellow eyes glittering in concern.

"Nightpaw?" The tortoiseshell asked, stopping a tail length away from her.

"Leave me alone," Nightpaw choked before turning away.

The cat did leave her alone, until it was time for the vigil not long after. In that time, however, Nightpaw felt a tug of loneliness and half wished the cat had stayed, so that there was someone to share her grief with.

As other cats gathered around her, placing fresh lavender and licking the blood from the bodies, the tortoiseshell appeared again. She didn't say

anything this time, but crouched next to Nightpaw silently. Nightpaw looked up to see the tortoiseshell looking at her.

"Sorry, Nightpaw. I'll stop staring at you - it probably looks quite creepy," the she cat said in a forced light tone.

"It's alright, Breezeflight," Nightpaw muttered, burying her nose into Timberdash's fur once more.

"You know, if you ever need to talk to anyone, I'm here," Breezeflight meowed, lightly brushing her tail along Nightpaw's back.

Nightpaw stared at her for a moment before saying a croaky 'ok' and turning back to Timberdash for what felt like the seven billionth time.

"Nightpaw? Nightpaw!" It wasn't Breezeflight this time, it was Emberpaw.

"Are you ok?" The calico tom meowed, slightly titling his head and looking at her with wide, amber eyes.

"Yes, I'm fine," Nightpaw meowed shakily.

She glanced around, realising that for some reason she was now on the small patch of grass and Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw were nowhere to be seen.

"Hold on - why am I on the ground and where in the name of StarClan have Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw disappeared to?" She asked.

"You fell off the fence and the others have went to find the source of the herb smell," Emberpaw replied, looking concerned. "Don't you remember?"

"No," Nightpaw admitted. "Why did they leave us behind?"

"So that we could scout the area,"Emberpaw meowed. "We should go that way."

The Calico tom pointed his tail towards another fence on Nightpaw's left, with a strong smell of dog coming from the same

direction.

"Yeah, I suppose," Nightpaw said, starting towards it.

"It's not like you to not be paying attention," Emberpaw said. "We definitely shouldn't go that way - it reeks of dog."

"You're smarter than you look," Nightpaw hesitantly replied; in truth, she was still wrapped up in thoughts about her old mentor.

Emberpaw at first looked like he was deciding whether to take it as a compliment or be offended by it. And then, he must have decided offended, because he looked slightly taken back. But he must have changed his mind because he stood up slightly straighter and raised his tail in the air, looking proud. The end result just made him look confused.

"I was thinking about my mentor," Nightpaw said quietly, deciding to just be honest with the tom. If she was going to spend possibly the rest of her life with him, then she was going to have to trust him.

"I miss Rustpelt as well, my brother, littermate and closest friend I ever had," Emberpaw replied, his mew thick with sympathy. "My mentor never really liked me, but Rustpelt was the cat I was closest to."

"Rustpelt?" Nightpaw asked. *How was his littermate, who was obviously the same age as him, a warrior whilst he was an apprentice?*

"I was held back from doing my warrior assessment by my mentor because he thought I wasn't ready. He used that as an excuse though, he just done it to spite me," Emberpaw explained, without even a hint of anger in his mew. Just sadness.

"You deserve to be a warrior," Nightpaw told him before turning towards the direction that Dawnpaw and Blizzardpaw must have went.

Nightpaw leapt up the smooth wood of the fence on her right, managing to scramble up slightly more gracefully than last time.

"Why are we going this way? Dawnpaw and Blizzardpaw already went this way," Emberpaw called before scrambling up the fence as well.

"It's the only way that isn't blocked, dangerous or that we haven't already went," Nightpaw said, sniffing the air for the other two apprentices' scent.

They headed off on the trail of Dawnpaw and Blizzardpaw, scrambling up numerous fences and luckily, not encountering any dogs. However, Nightpaw stopped abruptly at the top of one fence. In front of her was a large overgrown patch of grass, covered with many ferns and brambles. A broken Twoleg nest sat nearby. She could see a glimpse of two tabby pelts talking to a ginger she cat, who was lying down and looked skinny and frail. A small ginger tabby colour point tom kit sat nearby, with wide, scared eyes.

Nightpaw jumped down, Emberpaw just behind her, to hear "please take care of him for me" before the ginger she cat collapsed, unbreathing.

Chapter 7

Blizzardpaw narrowed his eyes. Did Dawnpaw really just tell *him* to shut up? Honestly, he was sort of impressed - the light brown tabby was usually calm and collected. He opened his mouth to reply but Emberpaw cut him off.

"Ok, everyone calm down," Emberpaw said, flicking his tail.

Of course. Emberpaw trying to be the peacekeeper. Couldn't he just be quiet so that Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw could sort it out themselves?

"Dawnpaw is right - we should investigate the herb smell," Emberpaw continued nervously after nobody responded.

Blizzardpaw narrowed his eyes. Why was *Emberpaw* suddenly taking the lead? Previously, Nightpaw had been the one trying to diffuse the argument. He glanced at the dark she cat, just becoming even more confused. She was staring into space, eyes wide and tail down. She looked... Terrified?

Blizzardpaw opened his mouth to ask what in the name of StarClan Nightpaw was doing, but was cut off by Emberpaw once again.

"Dawnpaw and Blizzardpaw should go and investigate - me and Nightpaw will scout the area."

The light grey tabby growled under his breath. That was the *second* time Emberpaw had cut him off just as he was about to speak and it was just to announce that he would be stuck with the she cat he had *just* had an argument with.

"Can't I do something else?" Blizzardpaw grumbled, pawing the smooth wood of the fence and noting how his paws quickly ached from the narrow frame.

"No - you're coming with me," Dawnpaw muttered, grabbing him by

his scruff of his neck onto the ground below.

The fresh grass brought a feeling of bliss to his already sore paws - they ached from a combination of standing on top of that StarClan cursed fence and fighting Dawnpaw earlier.

Blizzardpaw shook out his tabby pelt before trotting after the cinnamon tabby she cat that was already a few tail lengths ahead of him.

"So where exactly are we going?" He asked when he caught up.

"I don't know. Wherever this herb trail leads us, I guess," the apprentice beside him murmured distractedly.

Blizzardpaw growled in annoyance. Why did his fellow apprentice - the cat he was stuck with for probably the rest of the day- have to be so *mundane?* He had gotten her to argue back once, but there was no sign of that fiery spark inside her again.

The grey tabby pulled himself up yet another fence, glancing around at the top. He sniffed the air, noting there was a slightly tangy scent left behind by something strong - smelling. Blizzardpaw saw in the distance a white bundle of fur pulling itself over the rim of a plank of wood, which he assumed was one of the many, many, many other fences in this place.

"Dock," Dawnpaw muttered from beside him.

"Yeah, I can smell it," Blizzardpaw responded bluntly. "Did you see that?"

He flicked his tail to where the white fur had disappeared.

"It was a cat - probably our herb thief," the light brown tabby beside him replied after a moment. "Let's go."

They caught up the cat fairly quickly - whoever it was was going at an extremely slow pace.

"It feels like we're chasing a snail," Blizzardpaw said as the scent started to get stronger and stronger.

Dawnpaw didn't look impressed at his attempt at humour - in fact, she completely ignored him. The grey tabby tom realised that he had been completely dependant on Emberpaw for his daily dose of jokes and without them, no matter how exasperating they were, he missed the calico apprentice. If they were even apprentices anymore - they were technically loners.

As he pulled himself over the rim of an identical copy of the previous ten fences he had climbed over, Blizzardpaw spotted a bundle of white fur just below him, in pouncing distance. Without hesitation, he threw himself onto it.

"Rogue!" He yowled. "You will pay for what you have taken, and I will make sure it will be at *my* claws!"

He dug his claws deep into the sorry excuse for a cat, who had the nerve to go invading the Clans' territories just because Twolegs damaged them a bit. That didn't make them no longer their territories!

Blizzardpaw frozen as he flipped the cat around and came face to face with the scared, innocent blue eyes of a kit. A kit. The herb stealer was a kit!? He sheathed his claws, but still kept his paws firmly on the bundle of fluff beneath him.

"Who are you?" He growled.

The kit merely squeaked in response, it's fear tangible. It must have only been 4 moons, what in the name of StarClan was it doing all the way out here?

"Get off him, you mouse brain!" That wasn't the kit - that was Dawnpaw.

He lost his balance as the tabby unexpectedly shoved him off the kit beneath him, muttering under her breath.

"Are you ok? He didn't hurt you, right?" Dawnpaw asked the kit gently, carefully picking him up and putting him back on all four paws again.

The kit (flame point, Blizzardpaw now realised) nodded, long legs

quivering slightly. His cream fur was fluffed out, and scraps of a green leaf dotted his fur. That must be the dock they were trying to find.

Then Dawnpaw turned on Blizzardpaw.

"What where you thinking? That kit has done nothing to us, and you go and attack him with your claws unsheathed! It's against the warrior code to harm a kit, you know that as well as I do!"

"I know the warrior code, thank you very much, but in case you didn't notice, we aren't part of the Clans anymore. They are gone," was Blizzardpaw's reply after spluttering a bit.

Dawnpaw narrowed her eyes, giving a tiny sigh that told him she would continue it later. They both turned back to the kit, who was still looking absolutely terrified.

"No one's going to harm you now," Dawnpaw promised, giving a pointed glance in Blizzardpaw's direction. "Why did you need those herbs?"

When the kit didn't respond, Dawnpaw meowed "I know all the different herbs and how to use them, so I can help you."

The kit hesitated slightly, before flicking his ginger striped tail and trotting over to a bush in the corner of the patch of grass. The two apprentices followed and ducked under the low rim of the bush. Inside the makeshift den was a ginger tabby, who was clearly very sick. The den itself reeked of the smell of illness, and Blizzardpaw quickly glanced towards the entrance for the steady stream of fresh air flowing in.

"Spirit, I already told you, it is too late," the ginger she cat was explaining, her tone exasperated, yet gentle at the same time.

"No! It isn't - look, I brought some cats to help," the tom kit squeaked, the pure image of innocence.

Clearly, the ginger tabby hadn't noticed Blizzardpaw's and Dawnpaw's arrival, as her eyes widened when she realised they were there.

"Spirit, I told you not to speak to any strang-" her scolding was cut off as a bout of coughs racked her body.

"Can you help her?" Spirit asked quietly, directing his gaze to Dawnpaw.

"We should take her outside for some fresh air," Dawnpaw responded, not actually answering the question.

"I can make decisions for myself!" The sick she cat meowed weakly. "And I decide that I will go outside."

The ginger tabby struggled to her paws, and Dawnpaw rushed to help. The ginger she cat looked mildly annoyed, but accepted the help because she was practically forced to.

Blizzardpaw was the first outside. His pelt had been prickling uncomfortably the entire time he was in there. The smell was horrible, the pure innocence of the kit was painful, and he felt out of place. Sick cats were Dawnpaw's league, not his.

The ginger tabby collapsed on the grass outside, mere pawsteps away from the makeshift den.

"Are we sure Twolegs won't bother us?" Blizzardpaw asked, glancing around.

"They only come outside to maintain the garden, and they only done that yesterday, so everything should be fine," the ginger tabby responded very slowly, as coughs overcame her every few words.

"I'm Dawnpaw, and this is Blizzardpaw," Dawnpaw told her, flicking her tail at him.

Blizzardpaw was about to growl, but clamped his muzzle shut. Somehow, he didn't think telling Dawnpaw that he could speak for himself was appropriate in this situation.

"I'm Spark, and this is Spirit," she mewed weakly.

Spark then added hopefully, " can you really help?"

"No," Dawnpaw hesitated slightly. "We can look after Spirit though."

Blizzardpaw shot his companion a look. There was no way *he* was going to be looking after a kit. They had specific directions from StarClan to follow, and they didn't mention adopting a kit to slow them down!

"That would be great," Spark sighed, growing weaker by the second.

She flicked her tail, summoning Spirit over.

"Spirit, dear, these cats are going to look after you from now on," the she cat said. And then, directed at Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw this time,"please take care of him for me."

Then she died. Just like that. Blizzardpaw glanced at Spirit, who was sitting nearby and wearing a confused expression on his face.

"Why did she just fall asleep?" He asked.

Dawnpaw didn't reply, merely opening her mouth slightly and closing it.

"Spark is dead," Blizzardpaw told him bluntly. "She has went to StarClan, never to be alive again."

Spirit let out a soft moan.

'Good he understood' Blizzardpaw thought to himself. He couldn't be dealing with a ridiculously naive kit who doesn't understand the meaning of death.

"That was a bit harsh, wasn't it?" Blizzardpaw turned around to see Nightpaw standing next to him.

"Dawnpaw didn't know how to tell him, so I had to say it myself," Blizzardpaw replied softly, which surprised him because he *never* spoke softly.

"I get it," Nightpaw responded. Blizzardpaw got the impression that she wasn't just speaking about his words, but also the tone in which he said them.

"We need to look after Spirit now," Blizzardpaw told her, looking over to see that the tom kit was now snuggling into Emberpaw.

"That's his name - Spirit," Nightpaw murmured, sympathy in her gaze, which was directed at the tom. "We should welcome him and look after him - the death of a loved one is hard, and we *all* have experienced it very recently."

Blizzardpaw ultimately decided that he didn't like the way Nightpaw stressed the word 'all'. As if he didn't know just a few days ago he lost all that was important to him.

"I know," he snapped, slightly harsher then he intended to, but no harsher than usual.
"I just think that dragging around a kit will slow us down."

"We have our entire lives ahead of us, Blizzardpaw, we have enough time," Nightpaw meowed before trotting over to the group.

They eventually decided to make nests under a different bush and that they would continue their journey in the morning.

Chapter 8

Nightpaw flicked her tail, jumping down from the fence. She watched as Spirit stumbled over, falling in a small heap on the ground. One part of her wanted to feel sorry for the kit, but another part was slightly annoyed. The kit was slowing them down, whether he could help it or not.

"C'mon Spirit, not much further now," she said as the small tom kit scrambled to his paws. She hoped it was true.

"It better not be," Blizzardpaw growled, pushing Spirit forward with his nose.

" I was thinking - we should probably find somewhere where we don't have to keep on climbing over these fences," Emberpaw meowed.

"What!? Emberpaw was actually thinking?" Blizzardpaw said in mock surprise.

Dawnpaw rolled her eyes and Emberpaw seemed unfazed.

"I was," Emberpaw said, somewhat proudly. "And I think it's a good idea."

"It is," Nightpaw replied, "but this seems like the safest route."

"Until we meet the dogs over that fence," Dawnpaw pointed out, flicking her tail towards the fence ahead of them. Sure enough, there was a strong scent of dog coming from it.

"It's decided then," Nightpaw said, changing direction towards the acrid scent of a Thunderpath closer to the Twolegs nests.

"And who exactly said you was in charge?" Blizzardpaw growled.

"Nobody said I wasn't," Nightpaw shot back, sniffing the air tentatively before heading towards the Twolegs nests.

After crossing the short expanse of grass, they came to a gap in the wooden fence to the side of the Twolegs nest.

"It's a gate," Spirit mewed quietly in Nightpaw's ear.

"What's a gate?" The black she cat asked, but the kit didn't respond.

They passed through the 'gate', belly fur just brushing the ground. Well, Blizzardpaw's long fur was more spread out across the ground, as his fur was much longer than anyone else's.

When they emerged on the other side, they saw a plank of wood that seemed somehow connected to the gap they had just went through and the long, dark line of a Thunderpath stretching out towards the horizon. Bordering the Thunderpath, there were Twolegs nests of all shapes and sizes, occasionally there being dark, shadowy patches in between them. The noise was overwhelming - the rush of monsters and the chatter of Twolegs made the place seem much larger than it already was.

"We should try to cross the Thunderpath and get to the other side of this Twolegplace as quickly as possible!" Dawnpaw shouted, her ears pinned to the back of her head.

"Great idea! Let's go," Blizzardpaw replied, running over to the edge of the Thunderpath.

Nightpaw narrowed her eyes. It was unusual for Blizzardpaw to *actually* agree with someone - he must be terrified to have such a drastic change in character.

Nightpaw glanced at Spirit. To her surprise, the flame point tom kit looked no more scared than usual, and he was now hurrying after Blizzardpaw as fast as his little legs could take him.

Nightpaw ran after, crouching next to Emberpaw at the edge of the Thunderpath. Spirit squeezed in between, trembling slightly but not looking downright terrified.

"I'm going to help Spirit across so someone else has to say when to go," she meowed over the loud rumble.

"I will!" Dawnpaw said, eyes fixed on the monsters whizzing past.

"3"

The wind created by a red monster buffeted Nightpaw's fur.

"2"

She secured her teeth into Spirit's scruff, staring resolutely ahead.

"1"

The black she cat gulped, trying not to think about the many things that could go wrong.

"Go!"

Nightpaw shot forward, stumbling over Spirit slightly but not allowing herself to be put off by it. She felt her paws on the smooth surface, the acrid tang stinging her nostrils and the friction quickly warming up her paws.

She looked ahead. Only a few tail lengths to go. Her paw pads were starting to become sore, and she scratched one of her paws on a small stone lying on the Thunderpath.

Nightpaw jumped the final tail lengths, collapsing on the land ahead. It wasn't grass, but it wasn't Thunderpath material either.

She dropped Spirit and looked around to make sure everyone had made it. Dawnpaw was just about reaching the other end, and Blizzardpaw and Emberpaw were still in the middle.

"Wow! You really are fast," Dawnpaw gasped, before realising the other apprentices' absence. "Where are the others?"

Nightpaw didn't give an answer, instead she sprinted onto the Thunderpath again. She glanced up and saw a monster heading their way. If Blizzardpaw and Emberpaw didn't get out of the way, they would be as dead as a rabbit on WindClan territory.

She barrelled into them, trying to push the two mouse brained toms

the few tail lengths until the end. She wasn't strong enough, so instead pushed their heads to the ground, so that they would be as flat as possible.

Then she made the mistake of looking up.

Nightpaw saw the huge belly of the monster approaching, engulfing them, it's all consuming darkness blocking out all light. She kept her belly pressed against the ground, waiting for the moment to pass.

All in one go, the light returned, and she could see the monster going into the distance. No other monsters were approaching. Yet.

"Let's go, you mouse brains," she said, standing up, and flicking her tail.

It was only when the other two stood up that she realised what they were doing.

A cat was sprawled out on the Thunderpath, calico fur matted with blood. It's bright green eyes were open and glazed over, forever immortalising the horror filled look that the cat had last worn. It was, in a word, dead.

Nightpaw took a deep breath and buried her muzzle into the scruff of its neck, grasping it with her teeth. She tried to ignore the stank, rotten scent coming from it and gasped a breath of fresh air as she deposited it on the other side of the Thunderpath.

"I was just helping Emberpaw!" Blizzardpaw defended himself, despite the fact that nobody actually accused him of anything. "He wanted to get this dead cat off the Thunderpath and I didn't want him to end up like that cat."

Nightpaw looked at Emberpaw, who seemed... Grief stricken. His amber eyes had an expression all of them were now familiar with - the loss of a loved one.

"Darkflame," Emberpaw choked out. "My mother."

Dawnpaw started washing the blood from Darkflame's fur in respect, and Emberpaw joined her. Soon, they were all gathered

around the body, even Spirit, delicately licking the previous body of the StarClan warrior.

When they were finished, Emberpaw gaze held a new resolve. Nightpaw supposed that he had technically already grieved for his mother anyway, but seeing his mother's dead body added onto it a bit.

"We need to find this new territory," the calico tom said, his voice wavering slightly. "We need to find this new territory for my mother, for our loved ones, for all the cats lost from the Great Destruction."

Nightpaw nodded, images of her mentor (Breezeflight) flashing into her mind. They had to keep the memory of the Clans alive.

"Not going to happen," a voice sounded from behind them before Nightpaw felt a slight pain in her shoulder and blackness consumed her vision.

Chapter 9

Nightpaw blinked open her eyes. It didn't make much of a difference - she couldn't make out anything in the darkness. What had happened? The last thing she remember was finding that cat on the Thunderpath. Who was it again? Oh yes, Darkflame, Emberpaw's mother.

"Is anyone here?" She heard a voice call out in the darkness, small and shaking.

"Blizzardpaw?" Nightpaw narrowed her sharp yellow eyes, making out the shape of a massive grey furball in front of her.

The RiverClan apprentice sat up and gazed at her with piercing blue eyes.

"Nightpaw," he said, sounding a lot more redeemed than when he had previously spoken. "I don't think anyone else is here."

"What happened?" She asked, starting to make out dark stone walls rising up around them as her eyes adjusted to the light.

"A bunch of rogues attacked us, somehow managed to render us unconscious whilst barely lifting a claw and dumped us in here," he spat, fluffing up his light tabby fur.

Nightpaw turned to her shoulder, where a small scratch was oozing an odd green liquid. She sniffed it - it had a strange, tangy scent. The black she cat rolled over, trying to rub it off her shoulder.

"I'm guessing this is what made us unconscious," she said, wrinkling her nose at the green smear across the ground.

"Dawnpaw would know what it is," Blizzardpaw mewed. "But she's not here."

Nightpaw stood up and walked over to where a pile of rectangular things were piled on top of each other, small slithers of light

reaching through. It was the only side of this prison like den that wasn't a wall. She poked her nose through one of the gaps, not quite managing to lift the rectangular thing but she did get a good whiff of the air outside the den. It smelt of Twolegs food, the Thunderpath, and cats. Lots of cats.

"Ay! There's a nose pokin' through that box cage over there!" A gruff voice shouted, and she heard the thump of heavy pawsteps approaching.

Nightpaw ducked back inside, meeting Blizzardpaw's quizzical look.

"I have no idea where we are, but we are trapped," she meowed, backing away from the rectangular things.

A massive paw pushed them aside and a ginger face came into view.

"If ya try any heroics, you'll be dead before ya can say 'mouse'," the ginger tom snarled, green eyes narrowing menacingly.

Then he disappeared, leaving behind a gap in the rectangular things, which Nightpaw presumed were boxes.

"How mouse brained do you have to get to leave the perfect escape route for your prisoners?" Blizzardpaw muttered before wandering over to the gap. "Are you ready?"

"I feel like we should probably make a plan, but the others could be in danger, so I guess I'm ready as I'll ever be," Nightpaw replied, taking a deep breath.

Blizzardpaw crouched low on his haunches and leapt up, diving through the gap in the boxes. Nightpaw followed, sprinting after Blizzardpaw as he made his way through a massive open space. Around them 'box cages' towered around them, probably home to more prisoners. Their escape was making a commotion, and several cats, including the one that had let them escape, were heading after them.

Blizzardpaw was making a straight beeline for a box cage on the other side of the space, but his long fur was slowing him down.

"Save the others!" Blizzardpaw shouted as he turned around, baring his teeth. "I'll hold them off!"

Nightpaw hesitated, but only for a slight second. He was trained into the ways of a warrior, and would probably be able to hold them off enough time for her to save them.

As the black she cat neared the box cage, she realised why Blizzardpaw was heading for it. It was covered in Dawnpaw's scent, but StarClan knows how he managed to smell it all the way from where their box cage was.

She shoved the boxes aside with one paw, realising that it was considerably easier to do from the outside. A light brown tabby face met her from the inside.

"Nightpaw!" Her friend exclaimed, gracefully jumping out through the gap she had made.

"Let's go and find Emberpaw and Spirit, we don't have much time," Nightpaw replied breathlessly, turning around to check on Blizzardpaw.

The grey tabby was clearly losing the fight, and he wouldn't be able to carry on for much longer.

"They're not here," Dawnpaw said. "I can't explain now, but they haven't been captured."

Nightpaw sighed a short breath of relief before racing over to Blizzardpaw's losing battle. She hooked her claw into a ginger cat, dragging him to face her.

It was the ginger tom from before. He snarled at her and used his greater weight to pin her down onto the ground. His massive paws were pressed against her shoulders and she went limp, unbalancing him slightly. She used this as a opportunity to heave him off her and stand up.

The ginger tom faced her once more, and they started pacing, never taking their eyes off each other for a second. Nightpaw darted forward, scratching her opponent on the leg, before darting back

again before he could grab her. He snarled again and lunged, Nightpaw hopping gracefully to the side.

Suddenly, he reached out a forepaw midair, swiping her legs and causing her to lose balance. She fell on a heap onto the ground, but quickly stood up again. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Blizzardpaw flick his tail at her, and she darted away, not even glancing back at the ginger tom.

The black she cat ran after Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw through the open space, reaching a low wall that they could climb easily. She scrambled up after the others, sending small stones showering into the cats chasing them below.

They hopped down and dived into a dark corner, next to soms oddly shaped structures of brambles, with two cats sitting either side of each entrance.

The cats chasing them ran past, asking the guards if they had seen anything. The guards shook their heads and the cats continued on, in the hope that the guards had just somehow not seen three cats run past them.

"Don't touch the brambles," Dawnpaw whispered urgently. "They are coated in deathberry juice."

Nightpaw looked at the brambles next to them to see them covered in a red juice, possibly as added protection for a type of cage.

"These must be upgraded cages," Blizzardpaw meowed, as if reading her thoughts.

"They are," a voice called from within the brambles.

The three apprentices shrunk back and Nightpaw narrowed her eyes, making out a smoky Norwegian forest she cat in the bramble cage.

"For more...unwilling prisoners, like me," the she cat explained.

"Aren't you afraid the guards will hear us," Blizzardpaw said, his expression guarded.

The she cat snorted.

"One's deaf in his left ear and the other is asleep," she meowed, her voice dripping with disgust. "If they had to guard me, I would at least appreciate somebody more dignified doing it."

"Why don't you escape then?" Nightpaw asked, not entirely trusting the she cat yet.

"Because I have to walk right next to them, and that's enough to wake *any* cat up," the she cat replied, her green eyes glimmering in the darkness.

Nightpaw glanced over to the guards. Their claws looked unusually long and scars criss-crossed their pelts. It *did* look like the blue short haired one was asleep and the dark grey tabby had an absolutely shredded left ear.

"I guess you three are escaping," The she cat said. "How did you even end up here? Clan cats usually stick to their territories."

Nightpaw froze. How did this random she cat know they were clan cats? Blizzardpaw growled slowly and Dawnpaw raised her hackles.

"I don't know how you found out we were clan cats," Blizzardpaw meowed, his voice low. "But if you give us away, we will make your death *very* painful."

Nightpaw honestly doubted they would actually do that, but it did sound menacing. Apart from the fact it was coming from a cat up to shoulder height of the mysterious she cat.

"Ever heard of Shadow?" The she cat asked. "I was a ThunderClan cat once."

This time it was Dawnpaw's time to freeze.

"Sometimes the elders talk about a kit called Shadow. Left abandoned in the forest after her mother died, and ThunderClan saved her. She only stayed for a moon but definitely made quite a few friends, although some cats didn't like her," Dawnpaw gulped, her demeanor shifting slightly.

"You're talking about me like I'm not even here," Shadow meowed indignantly. "You have a choice: run off and save your own pelts, or be good cats and help me get out of this StarClan cursed place. If you choose the first one - I don't blame you and won't do anything about it. But you will have to live with the guilt of not saving me, not knowing what happened to me."

"We're saving you," Dawnpaw said before anyone else had any input. "You once saved some ThunderClan kits from a fox when they escaped from camp. It's time for us to repay the favour."

Chapter 10

"Hold on," Blizzardpaw meowed, barring Dawnpaw's way with his tail. "You are a medicine cat apprentice with no warrior training. How do you think you will fight exactly?"

"Well..." Dawnpaw replied. "You taught me a few moves, so I thought I would test them out for real."

"Maybe Dawnpaw can stay behind and me and Blizzardpaw can attack the guards," Nightpaw suggested.

"Or maybe we could just not help this cat at all," Blizzardpaw spat. "She's a random rogue that we met in a sketchy place and we don't even know she is who she says she is. She could be playing us!"

Blizzardpaw made a good point - that being to never trust strangers - but Nightpaw felt that they at least had to give the she cat a chance. And that's exactly what she told Blizzardpaw.

"When we get captured and killed, make sure to remember it's *your* fault," Blizzardpaw growled, his ice blue eyes like icicles.

"And when we escape, having fulfilled a good deed, make sure to remember who didn't want to do it," Nightpaw countered, unsheathing her claws.

Blizzardpaw muttered something under his breath before turning to Dawnpaw.

"You can help *Shadow* escape," the grey tabby told her. "Don't get involved with fighting if you don't have to."

"I won't," Dawnpaw promised. "But if it comes down to it, I will have to."

"Let's hope it doesn't," Nightpaw said. "Blizzardpaw, you can take the blue tom and I'll take the dark tabby."

"Fine by me," Blizzardpaw meowed, swishing his tail. "Just don't get killed, because we won't be able to bury you."

Nightpaw suspected that he didn't want her to be killed because he had actually begun to think of her as a friend, but didn't push him any further.

"You underestimate the power of WindClan," Nightpaw grinned, flexing her claws. "Are you ready?"

"To shred some rogues? Of course I am," Blizzardpaw replied. "Let's go then."

The grey tabby let out a caterwaul before hurling himself onto the blue gray tom. Nightpaw launched her attack on the other guard soon after, not giving him enough time to react. She pinned the tabby to the ground, staring deep into his dark amber eyes.

He snarled and heaved the black she cat off himself. The dark grey tabby was quite bulky, giving him the advantage of strength. Nightpaw, however, had the advantage of agility.

"I bet you can't catch me!" She teased, leaping back as the tom struck out at her.

"I'll show you," he growled back, chasing after her as she made her way back towards the box cages.

She glanced back, expecting the guards from other cages to be following as well, but they were just watching the scene before them with mild interest, not lifting a paw to help her pursuer.

Nightpaw dodged as a claw whistled past her ear, narrowing avoiding it catching her ear.

The tom behind her growled in frustration and leaped towards her with surprising force. She tried to move out of the way, but wasn't fast enough and the tom landed directly on top of her.

"I've got you now," he growled, his amber eyes glinting in the meagre sunlight. "Now I'll have to take you to the boss."

"I don't think so," Nightpaw heard a voice nearby, and the weight was suddenly lifted.

In front of her, a smoky black she cat was hurling the tom against a nearby wall, a light brown tabby watching from a distance.

"This is for keeping me trapped," Shadow growled, hooking a claw into the tom's scruff and throwing him at the wall.

"This is for trying to trap a cat half the size of you," she said, running her claws across his back.

"And this is a message for your boss," the she cat finished, bringing a paw down on the tom's head, rendering him unconscious.

Everyone was silent for a moment, Dawnpaw staring in awe at the smoky she cat, before Nightpaw broke the silence.

"Where's Blizzardpaw?" She asked, looking around.

The grey tabby apprentice and the blue tom - the guard he was attacking - were nowhere to be seen, with most things of the other guards sitting there and pretending that nothing was happening. There was one exception - a ginger tabby tom with green eyes, who was staring directly at them

"They went that way," the tom told them, flicking his ginger striped tail ahead of them. "Just get out of here so that we don't have to take care of you. We have much better things to be doing with our time."

"Like sleeping," a white she cat yawned. "Now get lost."

They hurried past the guards, Nightpaw narrowing her eyes at every cat that they passed.

"How lazy do you have to be to not even want to deal with intruders?" Nightpaw hissed to Dawnpaw, who merely shrugged.

Nightpaw wondered what had happened to Blizzardpaw. Admittedly, she hadn't looked at the tom during the fight, but she assumed he had been ok. After all, Blizzardpaw was a force to be

reckoned with.

She looked over her shoulder, realising that Shadow was falling behind. The smoky she cat had found a lot of strength when dealing with that guard, but with moons of starvation and neglect, Nightpaw supposed Shadow didn't have a lot of energy left.

"Go without me," Shadow called, somehow managing to put on a brave face. "Blizzardpaw probably needs you more than I do."

Nightpaw looked towards Dawnpaw, wondering if she was coming, but the light brown tabby shook her head.

"I'm not much use in battle and I'll only get in the way," she explained.

Nightpaw nodded and raced off along the path. After she had passed the bramble cages, the dingy walls rose up around her, making it even darker. Eventually, it became so dark that she was relying on her whiskers to stop her from crashing into a wall.

She stopped as a stream of fresh air coming from her left brought with it Blizzardpaw's scent. Along with the scent of blood.

Nightpaw turned left, and the passageway started to get lighter. She picked up the pace, the metallic scent of blood becoming stronger with every pawstep. She turned yet again into a narrow space with Twolegs nests either side. The Thunderpath could be seen at one end, and Twolegs scraps were littered about. In the centre of it, Blizzardpaw was being pinned down by the blue tom, his opponent's claws slowing digging into his throat.

"You don't have to do this," Blizzardpaw choked out.

Whatever the blue cat's response was going to be was cut off by Nightpaw leaped towards him, knocking him off Blizzardpaw.

She pinned him down, using a special move used by WindClan warriors to prevent larger cats from getting out of their grasp. She slowly applied pressure to his throat, watching the blue tom's eyes widen in fear.

"If you value your own life, I would suggest letting us go," Nightpaw growled.

"Ha! That's rich coming from a stick like you," the blue tom meowed, but his voice cracked.

Nightpaw pressed her black paw harder on his throat, until he was struggling for breath.

"Ok, ok! Please just let me go, and I won't harm any of you!" The blue tom begged.

Nightpaw backed off him, crouching down so that if he made any movement towards the two apprentices, she could pounce. Luckily, she didn't have to, and the tom scurried off in the direction of the Thunderpath as fast as his legs could take him.

The black she cat turned around, looking at Blizzardpaw properly for the first time since he had the battle. His light grey fur was matted with blood and he had some particularly deep claw marks on his hind leg. The tabby tom was currently lying down in the same place the blue tom had pinned him down.

"What happened?" Nightpaw asked, sniffing his leg and trying to ignore the aching pain she now felt in her bones that the adrenaline managed to cover up.

"That tom chased me down towards the other bramble cages and one of the other guards joined in the chase. Don't ask me why she couldn't just stay there, watching like the other guards, and instead decided to help that blue tom," Blizzardpaw meowed, grunting in pain before continuing. "It was me against these two ridiculously bulky cats. I did manage to scare one of them off, but the blue tom was persistent. At that point, I was weakened enough for him to cover me in all these soon-to-be scars and try to kill me."

Blizzardpaw shifted his leg slightly, his blue eyes glazed over with pain.

"You are lucky that I tired him out enough for you to pin him," he added.

Nightpaw jumped as she heard voices coming from where she had entered the space.

"I hope they're all right," she heard Dawnpaw mew from the passageway. "It smells like there's an awful lot of blood."

"You would smell a lot more blood if they were both dead," Shadow informed her.

Nightpaw briefly wondered how the older she cat knew that, but didn't linger on the thought because Dawnpaw had spotted them.

"You're alive!" Dawnpaw yowled, running the last few tail lengths towards them.

"Just about," Blizzardpaw growled, resting his gaze on Shadow. "And if you prove to be a traitor, you'll regret it."

"I am in your debt. It takes a lot for a cat to take on a fight like that, especially for one as young as you," Shadow meowed, her green eyes holding a sort of respect they didn't have before.

"Blizzardpaw! What happened to you?" Dawnpaw exclaimed, before recovering herself. "I'll need some cobwebs, some marigold and maybe some goldenrod - but I have no idea where to find them here."

Dawnpaw shook her head and started washing Blizzardpaw's bloodstained fur.

"Where does it hurt? Do you know if you can walk?" She asked, trying to inspect the wounds.

"Oh great StarClan. Dawnpaw's 'medicine cat mode' has activated," Blizzardpaw groaned, flinching as Dawnpaw touched his wounds.

Shadow snorted, but tried to cover it up by coughing instead, whilst Dawnpaw rolled her eyes, continuing to lick the blood away from Blizzardpaw's fur.

"Did you say you needed cobwebs? I could probably try to find some," Nightpaw offered.

"Yeah that would be great," Dawnpaw meowed distractedly.

"I could go as well - I know my way around better," Shadow pointed out.

"It would probably be better if you stayed here and picked out which Twoleg scraps are safe to eat," Nightpaw told her.

As the smoky she cat opened her mouth to protest, Nightpaw said,"We need to eat and you're the only cat available to find something for us to eat. I'll be fine - traversing the expanse of the Twolegplace in a search for cobwebs will be a breeze compared to trying to escape that Dark Forest like place."

Nightpaw turned around and headed for the Thunderpath, inspecting the walls for cobwebs as she went. Unfortunately, they were all too high for her to reach, so she had to go deeper into the Twolegplace.

Upon reaching the Thunderpath, she turned right and followed the it until she reached some wooden planks. They rose up vertically from the ground and other planks were attached horizontally near the top. The overall structure was quite low to the ground and there were cobwebs stretching across the planks where they were connected.

Nightpaw reached up her forepaws until she was leaning against the structure and placed one paw inside the cobweb. The cobweb instantly stuck to her paw, and she swiveled her paw around so that it was wrapped around her forepaw. She done this for various other cobwebs until the entire structure was cleared.

As she turned to head back, Nightpaw heard a familiar voice behind her.

"Now Spirit, we have to find a place to sleep because there are bad cats who want to hurt us at night," the voice was explaining.

The black she cat looked in the direction of the voice and saw a calico tom walking alongside the Thunderpath, the orange patches on his pelt looking like the embers of a fire in the setting sun.

Beside him, a small flame point tom kit was hopping along, trying to keep up. Her eyes locked with the calico Tom's and his expression became one of pure joy.

"Nightpaw!" Emberpaw purred, running over. "Where are the others?"

Spirit ran after him and butted his head into Nightpaw's chest fur.

"It's good to see you too Spirit," Nightpaw purred, licking the small tom's head. Turning to Emberpaw, she said "I'll show you where the others are. And I have a lot of explaining to do."

On the way back to Dawnpaw, Blizzardpaw and Shadow, she explained how they had been captured, broke out, helped break Shadow out, battled two guards and how Blizzardpaw had became injured.

Emberpaw had stared at her most of the time, sympathy and guilt apparent in his amber gaze. When she had finished, he told her what had happened to him and Spirit.

"The cats that captured you had some sort of poison on their claws, which made you unconscious. I managed to slip away with Spirit because there was five of us and only three cats trying to capture us," Emberpaw meowed, flicking his tail uneasily. "Dawnpaw, right before she was poisoned, told me to get Spirit somewhere safe, and that you would break out yourselves. I wanted to help free you, but I couldn't risk putting Spirit in danger, so I have been lurking outside here every sunset and sunrise for the past few days, hoping to see a sign that you had escaped."

They reached the narrow space between the Twolegs nests and Emberpaw dashed over to Dawnpaw and Blizzardpaw without hesitation.

"Blizzardpaw, are you ok?" Nightpaw heard Emberpaw meowed as she approached.

"What does it look like?" Blizzardpaw growled. "And don't ask 'what happened?' because I've already had it from two other cats."

"Someone's in a grumpy mood," Nightpaw said, unravelling the cobwebs from her paw and passing them to Dawnpaw.

"You would be as well," Blizzardpaw shot back.

As Dawnpaw applied the cobwebs, Nightpaw heard Emberpaw introducing himself and Spirit to Shadow, who still seemed like she wasn't going to murder then in their sleep like Blizzardpaw clearly thought she would.

As if reading her thoughts, the tabby tom followed her gaze and meowed "we can't trust her."

Dawnpaw sighed and pressed another cobwebs against one of Blizzardpaw's wounds. "We've already went over this - Shadow is not going to kill us all."

"If you say so," Blizzardpaw growled, but his face lit up slightly when Emberpaw started walking over with Twolegs scraps.

"Shadow told me to give these to you guys because she doesn't want to scare Blizzardpaw too much," Emberpaw said, depositing the scraps at their paws.

Nightpaw held in a purr and instead started holding down her portion of the scraps. When they had finished, they worked out a system so that there would always be a cat on lookout whilst they slept. Blizzardpaw was not happy about Shadow taking one of the shifts and said that he would rather do it himself, but Dawnpaw told him that he was injured and needed rest.

Nightpaw curled up next to Dawnpaw, finally giving in to the pain in her limbs from when that mouse brained tom had sat on her, and falling asleep.

Chapter 11

Nightpaw dumped a pile of Twolegs scraps at Blizzardpaw's paws. She noticed that his wounds seemed to be healing nicely - surprising considering they were in a place where Dawnpaw said that infection was very likely.

"When do you think you'll be healed enough to go?" Nightpaw asked. Staying right next to where they were captured made her uneasy, as well as the fact that they were staying in a Twolegplace.

"*I* don't know. Ask Dawnpaw - she's the medicine cat," Blizzardpaw grunted.

"Dawnpaw is off finding cobwebs and herbs," Nightpaw sighed. "Surely you must have some idea."

"I don't, hence why I said 'I don't know'," Blizzardpaw responded, irritated.

Nightpaw flicked her tail and went to find Shadow, annoyed but not entirely surprised. Blizzardpaw had became even more irritable than before he had gotten injured and Nightpaw just hoped that it was because he was feeling like an open target.

Nightpaw located the smoky black she cat in the far corner, telling some sort of story to Spirit. The usually quiet tom seemed quite lively and was begging for more.

".....And we'll have to stop there because Nightpaw is coming over with some scraps," Shadow meowed, licking her lips.

"Pleaseeee," Spirit begged. "I *need* to know if you defeated the foxes or not."

Nightpaw dropped their share of the Twolegs scraps at their paws. Shadow started ravenously tucking in whilst Spirit delicately nibbled on them.

"So, how's it going over here?" Nightpaw asked.

"Shadow won't tell me if she defeated the foxes or not," Spirit whined quietly.

"If she hadn't defeated them, she wouldn't be here now, would she?" Nightpaw pointed out and Shadow gave her a friendly glare.

"You just spoiled the fun!" Shadow complained, but with a light hearted tone. "Making Spirit wait brings *some* entertainment to kit sitting."

"I think you enjoy spending time with Spirit anyway," Nightpaw teased. It was true as well - it was actually Nightpaw's turn to look after Spirit but Shadow had offered to do it anyway.

Shadow licked her lips. "Got any more scraps?"

Nightpaw narrowed her eyes. Shadow *always* changed the topic when she was in an argument she knew she couldn't win.

The black she cat rolled her eyes. "Not any more for *you*."

"Well, since you're finished, you can continue the story!" mewed Spirit excitedly.

Shadow grunted and continued the story, describing how she had defeated the foxes. Spirit squeaked once in a while, getting overexcited at the prospect of the great mighty Shadow attacking some foxes.

Nightpaw purred and turned around; Dawnpaw was back. Nightpaw trotted over to where she was removing cobwebs to Blizzardpaw's wounds.

"You are healed enough to start travelling again," the light brown tabby was saying.

"Perfect!" Nightpaw meowed. "We've already been here a quarter moon and we need to follow that prophecy StarClan told us, remember?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it a prophecy. More like an order," Blizzardpaw growled.

"Well, whatever it is, we need to do it," Nightpaw responded.

"Do we though? We follow StarClan's orders blindly because we have grown up with the message that StarClan protects us. But answer me this - if StarClan cared about us, why did they let the Twolegs destroy the Clans without any warning?" Blizzardpaw asked, his tail lashing angrily.

Nightpaw didn't know what to say. Anger filled her from ear to tail tip, but part of her wanted to agree with Blizzardpaw. Why *did* StarClan give them no warning? She looked at Dawnpaw for an explanation.

"They might have been unable to communicate a message to us," Dawnpaw insisted. "Or they didn't see it coming. It was a Twoleg act after all, not something done by cats."

Blizzardpaw opened his mouth to respond, but was thankfully cut off by Emberpaw.

"How are you today, Blizzardpaw?" The calico tom asked. "Are your wounds healed yet?"

"They are," Blizzardpaw growled. "So yes, we can start travelling again."

"Great!" Emberpaw purred. "We can continue our mission."

Nightpaw glanced over to Shadow and Spirit. They would have to bring Spirit along with them, unless...

"I have an idea," the black she cat announced. "Let's be honest, Spirit is a burden to us all, and is slowing us down. But Shadow is in our debt, which means we can ask her to take care of Spirit for us, just until we complete our mission."

"That could work," Dawnpaw murmured.
"Who wants to ask her?"

When no one replied, Nightpaw volunteered herself. It's not like she *wanted*
to do it, but clearly nobody else was going to.

She trotted over to Shadow, trying to look calm and collected.

"Hey, Shadow," Nightpaw meowed cooly, flicking an ear in greeting.

"Hello, Nightpaw," the smoky she cat narrowed her eyes in suspicion. "What's going on?"

"Well I-," Nightpaw cleared her throat. "We were just wondering if we could ask you a favour."

"You can," Shadow meowed, still looking suspicious. "Spit it out then - what is it?"

"We were sent a mission by StarClan to go on a journey but we don't want to drag Spirit along on the journey with us. So we were wondering if you could look after Spirit for us, just until we finish the journey," Nightpaw said. "He likes you way more than any of us anyway."

Shadow paused, considering the offer. Then she looked at Nightpaw, her green eyes sparkling in the dim light.

"I will," Shadow meowed eventually. "Take it as a 'thank you' for getting me out of that StarClan accursed place."

"How did you even manage to get there in the first place?" Nightpaw asked, studying the she cat's huge claws.

"Even I can't fight off five cats armed with poison and dog teeth," Shadow growled, lashing her tail at the memory.

"Dog teeth?" Spirit squeaked. Nightpaw had completely forgotten that he was there.

"Yes - in that group's hierarchy, the better fighters that contribute more to the group seem to get the reward of dog teeth to fight with," Shadow spat.

Nightpaw meowed a quick goodbye before trotting back over to Dawnpaw. As she left, she heard Shadow muttering something about flea pelts, and realised she would probably have to tell the older she cat to mind her language around Spirit.

"All went well," Nightpaw told the others when she reached them. "Shadow has agreed to take care of Spirit."

"I guess we'll have to set out tomorrow then," Dawnpaw mewed, a hint of sadness in her voice. "Shadow was a legend in ThunderClan - I just wish I got to know her more."

"A legend!" Blizzardpaw snorted. "I can't imagine her being *that* great."

Dawnpaw fixed Blizzardpaw with an icy glare and said, "she came to ThunderClan as a kit whose mother had died. She stayed for a few moons and when she was about 7 moons old, she went out of camp to find a group of kits who had went missing. She saved the kits from a group of foxes, and the elders used to tell that story to young cats to show that not all loners are bad."

"Cool!" Emberpaw meowed. "I always thought the cats in the elders' stories were long gone."

Nightpaw nodded in agreement. It *was* pretty cool that they had stumbled across a cat who had an entire story about themselves in the ThunderClan elders' den.

She looked towards the opening in the dark *alley,* as Shadow has once told them it was called. The sun was setting, turning the sky into a mix of reds, oranges and purples. A few StarClan warriors were now appearing in the sky. She wondered if one of them was Breezeflight, and if her mentor was proud of how far she had came.

Chapter 12

Nightpaw, Blizzardpaw, Emberpaw and Dawnpaw looked back at the two cats before them. A smoky black she cat towered over the small flame point tom beside her, and their expressions were mournful. Shadow's was less mournful, but there was still a glimmer of sadness behind her steely gaze.

"See you whenever you decide to come back for Spirit then," Shadow meowed, clearing her throat awkwardly.

"I suppose so," Nightpaw replied. "I'm sure you'll look after him well."

"Ok then, bye Shadow and Spirit," Blizzardpaw said before turning around and starting to walk along the quiet Thunderpath next to them. They had gotten up just before dawn, so there were very few Twolegs and monsters about.

"Bye," Nightpaw, Emberpaw and Dawnpaw said in unison.

"Bye," Spirit squeaked quietly. "Good luck on your trip."

"May StarClan light your path," Shadow dipped her dark head.

"And yours," Nightpaw mewed before heading after Blizzardpaw.

The black she cat didn't turn back, but she imagined Shadow and Spirit behind them, watching as they made their way into the distance. She couldn't bear to see the small tom kit watching his carers essentially abandon him on the edge of a Thunderpath.

"It had to be done," Dawnpaw murmured from beside her, though it sounded more like the brown she cat was trying to convince herself more than Nightpaw.

"It did," Nightpaw agreed, flicking her tail and catching up with Blizzardpaw.

The light grey tom was walking alongside the Thunderpath, occasionally glancing warily in its direction.

"Do you actually know which direction we need to go?" Nightpaw asked.

"No, of course I don't, I have been practically immobile for the past quarter moon," Blizzardpaw growled. "Didn't it cross your mind that you should probably figure this out before we left?"

Nightpaw breathed in deeply and let it out, trying not to rise to Blizzardpaw. She tried to remind herself that sometimes he wasn't such a pain in the tail to be around, and he *could* be semi enjoyable company. She gritted her teeth before responding.

"No, it didn't, because I have been so preoccupied with collecting scraps, looking after Spirit, keeping guard and collecting cobwebs for *you*. So have Emberpaw and Dawnpaw. So can't you just be nice for once in your life and *not* be so annoying to everyone," Nightpaw meowed. It had came out way harsher than she intended and she realised that it was probably a good thing she had tried to calm herself before responding because StarClan knows what would have came out of her mouth if she didn't.

The grey tabby tom had been looking at her through narrowed eyes the entire time but his gaze softened slightly after she finishes speaking. But not in a sympathetic way. In a sad way.

"I get it," Blizzardpaw meowed quietly. "You don't like me and only stick around because you're forced to."

Nightpaw opened her mouth to speak, but Blizzardpaw had already picked up the pace and left her behind. The grey tabby was now several fox lengths in front of her. Then he turned around and started heading her direction again, his icy blue gaze never leaving her eyes.

"Blizzardpaw, I-" the black she cat started speaking but was cut off.

"I'm going," Blizzardpaw stated bluntly.

"Going? Where?" Nightpaw asked, becoming increasingly panicked.

There was a high chance that Blizzardpaw was thinking of leaving them for good.

"Somewhere else. Maybe the mountains. Maybe home if the Twolegs haven't completely destroyed it," his voice cracked on the last few words. "And before you ask, I'm going now."

Nightpaw stared at him for a few seconds, not knowing how to respond. Her worst fears were confirmed - he was planning on leaving them forever. He wasn't coming back.

She glanced behind her to see Dawnpaw and Emberpaw padding along at a steady pace, deep in discussion and unaware of what was currently going on. The black she cat turned around to see Blizzardpaw gone.

She stopped and looked around, noticing that he was slipping into a narrow alley. His blue eyes glinted as he turned around one last time, before being engulfed in the darkness.

"Where's Blizzardpaw?" A light voice asked. Emberpaw.

She turned around to face the Calico and light brown tabby pelts in front of her. The two apprentices that were still left.

"He's gone," Nightpaw forced the words out.

"Gone?" Emberpaw and Dawnpaw echoed, not realising the gravity of the situation.

"I made him think we didn't want him here, so he left," Nightpaw's voice cracked as she looked in the direction of where Blizzardpaw had disappeared.

Dawnpaw and Emberpaw followed her gaze, their eyes grief stricken. Blizzardpaw was one of them. Nightpaw's gaze hardened with new resolve. She was going to get the apprentice back, because she knew they wouldn't be able to continue without him, no matter how annoying he was.

"We can't do this without him," Dawnpaw meowed, as if reading her thoughts.

"Yeah! He's one of us!" Emberpaw agreed.

"We're not going to," Nightpaw replied. "We're going to get him back."

Dawnpaw and Emberpaw nodded their heads, their gazes fixed on Nightpaw. They were waiting for a plan.

"I don't know if this will be enough to convince him, and it's not much of a plan, but it's something," Nightpaw began. She flicked her tail towards the dark alley. "Blizzardpaw went that way. I don't think he actually knows where he's going, but his scent should be easy to follow. We need to follow it, find Blizzardpaw, say something to make him come back, and mission complete."

"That sounds like a great plan," Dawnpaw said. "But there is one major flaw."

"What?" Nightpaw asked.

"You was the one who made Blizzardpaw leave, so only words from you convincing him to come back will really matter. I've seen it loads of times - you'd be surprised about how many arguments happen in the medicine cat den," Dawnpaw explained.

The logic behind it made sense. Nightpaw hadn't mentioned Emberpaw or Dawnpaw, and neither had Blizzardpaw. It was *her* who had made Blizzardpaw think *she* didn't want him there.

"You should still come though - showing how much support he has will help convince him," Nightpaw pointed out.

They agreed on a slightly altered version of the original plan and headed towards the narrow alley. It was a lot smaller than the one they had lived in for a quarter moon but smelt ten times worse. A skinny rat scurried past them, it's fur covered in fleas. Nightpaw curled a lip in disgust.

As they continued further into the alley, it became apparent Twolegs rarely went down there. The only scraps were rotting, attracting swarms of flies, and even the rotting scraps were few and far apart.

Eventually, they managed to catch a whiff of a different smell. It had the very slight hint of fish and smelled overwhelmingly familiar. Nightpaw glanced at the two cats flanking her. They nodded, amber and green eyes glinting in the otherwise engulfing darkness. She raised her nose to snuff the air and realised that it came with a slight breeze. That must mean the end of the alley was approaching.

Suddenly, a low wall came into view, with silver birch trees behind it. On top of it, silhouetted by the sun, was a cat. A large, long furred cat who was mostly made up of fur. Nightpaw looked at Dawnpaw and Emberpaw, silently asking them to get in positions with a flick of her tail. They quietly sat either side of the low wall, waiting for Nightpaw to approach.

The black she cat gulped before making her presence clear by doing a run up to the wall and leaping to sit next to Blizzardpaw. After getting over the initial shock of a car randomly appearing our of nowhere, Blizzardpaw didn't seem surprised it was her.

"Blizzardpaw," Nightpaw said, and then didn't know what to say, so there was just an awkward silence in the air.

The tabby didn't respond, instead merely gazing at her.

She cleared her throat and tried again.

"Blizzardpaw," she repeated. "You are one of us. You can't leave."

She was aware of how desperate she sounded, but at that point, she didn't care. The grey tom was annoying, but he was part of their group. Pretty much the only positive of the fire was that it had shoved her into the paths of him, Emberpaw and Dawnpaw. Three great cats.

Blizzardpaw turned away from her, now not able to look at her.

"Watch me," he said, his voice hoarse. "Nobody has ever liked me, and obviously you are no exception."

He prepared to jump down from the wall onto the soft ground beneath the birches, but was stopped by what Nightpaw said next.

"You can't leave because you are my friend," she said forcefully. "When WindClan still existed, there were no other apprentices my age. And my parents died not long after I became an apprentice. My only friend was my mentor, Breezeflight, who is now dead as well."

She paused before continuing.

"You, Emberpaw and Dawnpaw are better friends then I could have asked for. I'm just sorry for not being a good friend to you."

She gave a slight flick of her tail, signalling to Dawnpaw and Emberpaw that she was done and that they could come whenever they were ready.

"Don't be ridiculous," Blizzardpaw meowed. "*Of course* you're a good friend."

"And so are you," Emberpaw told Blizzardpaw, leaping onto the wall. "If you left us, I don't know what I would do."

"Will you come back?" Dawnpaw asked, her green eyes glimmering with worry.

"Of course I will!" Blizzardpaw purred.

Nightpaw's jaw went slack with shock. Did Blizzardpaw actually just *purr?* Dawnpaw and Emberpaw were having the same sort of reaction.

"I didn't know you had it in you," Emberpaw finally said.

Blizzardpaw shrugged. "Arguments bring out the best and worst of cats, I suppose."

He glanced around at the trees ahead of them.

"And I think we've stumbled upon the place we've been looking for."

Chapter 13

Nightpaw surveyed the land in front of her, quickly realising that Blizzardpaw was probably right. The 'worst floods' were probably caused by a river in the distance overflowing in heavy rain, especially in leaf fall. The 'silver all year round' probably referred to the silver birches scattered across the territory. And, if it was the correct place, it should be safe from Twolegs.

The black she cat looked around, realising that everyone was silent, in awe at Blizzardpaw's discovery. The grey tabby was the first to break the silence.

"So, what now? StarClan didn't exactly give us clear instructions on what to do when we found this place," he grunted, shaking out his pelt.

"I guess we have to communicate with them again?" Emberpaw asked more than said, looking at Dawnpaw.

"There must be a place we can communicate with them here, or they wouldn't have sent us all this way," Dawnpaw meowed, but she looked uncertain herself.

"We should probably hunt before we do anything. Whilst we're doing that, we can be on the lookout for anything that looks like something StarClan would use to communicate with," Nightpaw decided, already sniffing the air and hoping to scent some rabbit.

"That's a good idea," Dawnpaw said. "But, Blizzardpaw, you'll have to be careful with your leg."

"I'll be fine," Blizzardpaw rolled his eyes and muttered something under his breath.

Blizzardpaw's eyes suddenly lit up and he lifted his tail higher. "There might be fish in the river!" He mewed excitedly.

"Yeah! And there might be frogs somewhere too, because there seems to be some swampy ground behind the river!" Emberpaw meowed as well.

Everyone else looked at him in disgust.

"Frogs?" Blizzardpaw curled his lip in disgust. "I'd rather roll in a pile of fox dung than eat *that."*

Emberpaw looked disheartened at this, so Nightpaw said that she might try one later.

"Since everyone seems to have different ideas of what to hunt, we should probably split up," Nightpaw reasoned, before turning to Dawnpaw. "Who do you want to go with?"

Dawnpaw paused slightly, deciding which hunt would be the most entertaining to watch.

"I'll go with Emberpaw. I've never seen frogs before, but I've heard that they're quite slimy, so I want to see how he's going to catch them," Dawnpaw announced, jumping down from the fence and starting to head in the direction of the swamp.

"We should meet back here just before sunset," Blizzardpaw called.

Nightpaw glanced at the sky, noticing that it was past sunhigh. She nodded in agreement before turning away and leaping onto the ground below. In most parts, it was quite firm but some of the ground was spongy, as if she was stepping on moss. It was a nice feeling in her paws, but wouldn't help her if she ended up chasing a rabbit. She heading towards the area of former ground, opening her mouth to identify the scents. A sweet and musky scent touched her scent glands. It reminded her of grassy hills, the moor and home.

"Rabbit!" She whispered under her breath before dropping into a crouch.

She skirted a bush and the grey animal came into view. It was sat between two silver birches, ears pricked upright in search of danger.

A mouse may have the advantage of feeling your vibrations, but a rabbit has the gift of speed. It can decide life or death for the rabbit, and whether a warrior is able to feed their clan or not. Us WindClan warriors nurture our speed to compete with the rabbit, and have a chance of going to our nests with full bellies, but we must never forget that the rabbit is always faster. That is why we need the element of surprise." Nightpaw repeated the first hunting lesson every WindClan apprentice was taught. It was to remember that the rabbit is always faster, so she must choose her pawsteps carefully.

The black she cat slunk through the undergrowth, noticing in satisfaction that there were very little twigs on the ground and there were quite large gaps between the individual trees. That would make hunting quicker.

Her yellow eyes darted about, trying to find the nearest rabbit hole. It was right behind the rabbit, and right in front of her. She couldn't let it escape back into there.

She stopped when she was about a tail's length away from the rabbit hole, she could leap that easily, but couldn't get within pouncing distance of the rabbit itself without risking giving herself away. That was fine though; once she blocked the rabbit hole the rabbit would panic, run and she should be able to catch it quite easily as it was unprepared.

Nightpaw crouched as low to the ground as possible, wiggled her haunches, and pounced, landing directly in front of the rabbit hole. The rabbit squealed in terror and ran for its life.

The black she cat sprinted after it, enjoying the run after over a quarter moon in the Twolegplace. Her muscles bunched and unfolded at her every command, letting her gain distance on the panicked rabbit.

It suddenly darted between her paws, trying to get back to the rabbit hole, but that was a mistake. It was running into a death trap. Nightpaw quickly bit it on the back of its neck before muttering a thanks to StarClan.

She managed to catch a mouse as well by the time she started to

head back. She had tried to catch a thrush, but WindClan apprentices had minimal training on how to catch birds, and the thrush had flown away in front of her claws.

She deposited the rabbit and the mouse in front of the fence where they had first discovered this place. It seemed like a good territory - there were no rogues, she hadn't smelt any foxes yet, and it had a part of all the clans in it. The forest of ThunderClan, the open space of WindClan (it was nothing compared to the moors, but the trees were spread out enough that you could see quite a lot of the sky), the river of RiverClan and the swamp of ShadowClan.

"Salmon!" Nightpaw jumped as she heard a voice behind her. "There was salmon! And trout, Nightpaw, my favourite fish!"

She turned around to see that Blizzardpaw was looking fairly excited, for him at least. Nightpaw grinned to see Blizzardpaw so happy - he was usually in a constant bad mood.

"I got a rabbit as well!" Nightpaw mewed, licking her lips. "I haven't had one in what feels like moons!"

Blizzardpaw nodded in agreement. "Do you want to try some fish? I know you're WindClan and all, but I bet you'll find it so good you'll never want to go back to rabbit again."

Nightpaw sniffed the fish warily, doubting that she'd ever like it better than rabbit, but Blizzardpaw looked the happiest she's ever seen him, and it was hard to say no.

"I will - if you try some rabbit," she decided, nosing the rabbit towards him. "I wonder how Emberpaw and Dawnpaw are getting on with their frog."

Blizzardpaw snorted. "Considering they're not back yet, I would say not well. Fine by me, because I don't want to even look at one."

"What has a frog ever done to you?" Nightpaw teased.

"Well, since they swim in water, non RiverClan cats compare them to fish, when there is a clear difference - fish is delicious, frogs are disgusting," Blizzardpaw sniffed as if it was a personal insult to him

before continuing. "And once, when I was practising fishing in the river, a frog came out and landed on my face. For some absurd reason, a patrol had been trying to catch it to see how it tasted." Blizzardpaw shuddered. "It was horrible - all slimy and a strange sort of damp."

Nightpaw privately thought that fish were also slimy, but didn't say her thoughts aloud. Instead, she bit into the salmon's flesh and was taken back by how it tasted. It was like nothing she'd ever had before, which made it sort of refreshing. However, there was a, for lack of a better word, fishy taste to it that was absolutely disgusting. But she forced a smile on her face as she took another bite.

"It's... Interesting," Nightpaw finally said. "I've definitely not tasted anything like it before."

Blizzardpaw flicked his tail, satisfied with her answer. He took a bite into the rabbit and Nightpaw watched closely for his reaction. His eyes widened slightly, and he looked quite surprised.

"It doesn't compete with fish, but it's better than I thought it would be," he mumbled through a mouthful of rabbit.

"Would you have it again?" Nightpaw asked - his reaction had seemed a lot more positive than her reaction to the fish.

"Only if there's no fish around," Blizzardpaw decided before flexing his claws and adding, "but there'll always be fish around if I can help it."

They both jumped when two cats came crashing through the bushes, out of breath.
Emberpaw was clutching a frog in his mouth, and Dawnpaw's eyes were gleaming in excitement.

"What took you two so long? It's already sunset," Blizzardpaw asked, glaring at the frog Emberpaw held in his jaws.

"We found it!" Dawnpaw said proudly. "We find a place to communicate with StarClan."

Chapter 14

Nightpaw pelted after Dawnpaw, catching up with her with ease. They had buried their catch next to a birch tree and we're now running full speed to where Dawnpaw said she has found the place to communicate with StarClan. The sky was slowly turning dark and, if it was anything like the Moonstone, a cat would have to wait until moonhigh to speak to the stars.

"It's in the middle of the swamp," Dawnpaw was explaining breathlessly. "The river loops around it."

They skidded to a halt at the edge of the birch tree forest. There *was* still birch trees in the swamp, but fewer, and the ground was far soggier.

"Over there," Dawnpaw pointed her tail to a giant tree directly in the centre of the swamp. It was ancient, and by far the largest tree Nightpaw had ever seen.

Blizzardpaw narrowed his eyes. "How do you actually know we communicate with StarClan there?"

"I can sense it," Dawnpaw meowed.

"Ohhh you can *sense* it," Blizzardpaw replied, clearly not believing it.

Nightpaw also didn't know how Dawnpaw just managed to *sense* it but she assumed Dawnpaw knew what she was talking about - she *was* the medicine cat after all.

"I can!" Dawnpaw meowed. "I have communicated with StarClan loads of times, remember?"

"Well, instead of standing around here arguing, why don't we go and check it out?" Blizzardpaw grumbled, despite the fact that he had started it in the first place.

"Yeah! We might even see actual StarClan cats," Emberpaw meowed, wading into the swamp without hesitation.

Nightpaw stepped in gingerly after him, the thick, slimy water coming up to the half way point on her foreleg. She shuddered as her paws squelched in the mud.

"This is horrible," Dawnpaw meowed through gritted teeth.

"You wanted to come here," Blizzardpaw reminded her, wading after Emberpaw. "Also, don't think that I am enjoying this either - river water is way different from *this*."

"It gets deeper over here!" Emberpaw called back, sounding like he was actually enjoying himself.

"Great," Nightpaw muttered sarcastically as water began to rise to her belly fur.

She set her gaze on the tree they were heading for. All she needed to do was to keep her eyes on the tree, and nothing could go wrong.

Nightpaw yelped as her paws came down on something slippery and small, and a frog kept out from her claws into her chest fur. This caused her to slip in the mud and fall into the swamp water. All she could see was murky darkness that had a slight tingle of green to it, and when she tried to take a breath, she sucked in a mouthful of water.

She started panicking, trying to stand back up again, but kept slipping on the mud beneath her paws. She then felt teeth gruffly grip her scruff and pull her up to the surface into a standing position.

Blizzardpaw peeled the frog from her chest.

"Frogs. I swear they originated from the Dark Forest," Blizzardpaw growled, chucking the frog back into the water.

Nightpaw coughed up some swamp water before muttering a weak "thanks" to Blizzardpaw. Dawnpaw came wading over, making sure that she had coughed up most of the swamp water.

"Nightpaw! Are you ok?" Emberpaw asked, coming back over from where he was far ahead of everyone else.

"Yeah, I'm fine. You should have warned us about the frogs though," Nightpaw meowed, shaking her pelt out and causing water droplets to fly everywhere.

"The frogs?" Emberpaw looked confused for a moment. "Ohhh, they do that sometimes, but they're not harmful."

"Yeah right," Blizzardpaw snorted before continuing to wade through the water.

Nightpaw followed, her gaze now flicking between the tree and the water. She couldn't actually see anything through the murky depths, but it made her more reassured that if another frog jumped out at her, she would be prepared.

She started to feel the water getting shallower, and soon she was stepping out of the swamp onto a piece of solid land. Her belly fur and legs were completely coated in mud, which she knew would take ages to groom out. It was lucky she didn't have long fur like Blizzardpaw, who was growling in frustration.

"StarClan better make this good," he growled, trying to pull clumps of mud out of his tangled fur.

Nightpaw narrowed her eyes a tree massive oak tree beside them. Its branches spread far higher than any other tree on the swamp, and its roots led far into the water. The air had a strange feeling, as if it held power far beyond the scopes of imagination.

"Wow," Dawnpaw breathed, appearing next to her. "This is the feeling I had when I used to visit the Moonstone every half moon."

Blizzardpaw had evidently gave up on trying to pull the mud out of his fur and was now gazing at the tree.

"That's the biggest tree I've ever seen," he eventually meowed.

"It sure is!" Emberpaw replied, excitement glistening in his eyes. "Where will we find StarClan?"

"There must be an entrance somewhere," Dawnpaw said, walking around to the back of the tree. "Its over here!"

Nightpaw followed in Dawnpaw's pawsteps, until she came to a gaping hole at the base of the tree. Ivy drooped down from the trunk, nearly covering the entrance up completely. The brown tabby was already sticking her head through the ivy, peering inside.

"What can you see?" Emberpaw asked, trying to poke his head through as well.

"An endless void," Dawnpaw meowed. "But my whiskers are telling me there's a passageway here."

"You can take the lead then," Blizzardpaw meowed, appearing beside Nightpaw.

Dawnpaw padded forward, shoving ivy out of the way to get through. Emberpaw and Blizzardpaw followed, with Nightpaw bringing up the rear.

Nightpaw shuddered as the darkness engulfed her. It was complete blackness, and was really like the endless void Dawnpaw described it to be. The feel of power in the air was stronger now, to the point where it was overwhelming.

Nightpaw jumped as Blizzardpaw's tail whisked her nose. She couldn't see the tabby at all, despite the fact that he was clearly right in front of her. The darkness was arguably worse than that at the Moonstone, which was pretty dark. So was the atmosphere - it didn't have the ancient power of many generations of cats following the tunnel that the Moonstone did, it had a raw, fresh power that would make any cat overwhelmed.

Nightpaw shook her head, realising that she had stopped. She could smell the scent of the others ahead of her, but couldn't tell how far away. Their pawsteps echoed off the tunnel walls. She walked forward slowly, and was relieved to feel the fur on Blizzardpaw's tail brush her nose once more.

"It gets narrow here," Dawnpaw called from the beginning of the

line.

She wasn't joking - the tunnel started getting so narrow that a full grown warrior would fit inside with only a bit of room to spare. And they were, Nightpaw now realised, pretty much the size of full grown warriors.

Nightpaw felt a blast of fresh air on her muzzle and realised that they were about to enter a cavern. They filed out into it, squinting in the newfound light.

"We can now actually see each other," Blizzardpaw growled.

As her eyes adjusted to the change in brightness, Nightpaw saw that they were in a cavern with a stream trickling through it and a hole in the ceiling, much like the one at the Moonstone, shining moonlight onto the stream.

"Is this where we communicate with StarClan?" Nightpaw asked Dawnpaw, flicking her tail towards the stream.

Dawnpaw nodded. "I think so - it reminds me of the Moonstone."

Dawnpaw crouched down next to the stream and Nightpaw sat next to her with Blizzardpaw and Emberpaw.

"I suppose we just touch our noses to it," Dawnpaw meowed, before dipping her nose into the water and closing her eyes.

Nightpaw followed suit, wrinkling her nose as she dipped it into the water. She closed her eyes, trying to relax, and opened her eyes to the prey rich hunting grounds of StarClan.

Chapter 15

Nightpaw looked around, taking in the cats around her. Blizzardpaw was greeting a seal point tom and a brown she cat, who she recognised as Troutstar, the leader of RiverClan. Emberpaw was talking to the ShadowClan leader, a ginger tabby she cat called Duskstar. Dawnpaw was rubbing muzzles with a tuxedo tom, whilst Ivystar, a blue ticked tabby tom, stood watching. And in front of Nightpaw...

"Breezeflight!" Nightpaw yowled, running up to the dilute calico standing in front of her.

"Nightpaw! It's good to see you," Breezeflight, her mentor and her best friend, purred, rubbing muzzles with her.

Nightpaw stood there for a moment, breathing in her mentor's familiar scent. She pulled away as a cream she cat with light brown patches approached them.

"Featherstar," Nightpaw purred.

The former WindClan leader's eyes were now gleaming with a new energy, and all of the grey hairs on her muzzle had disappeared to be replaced with soft brown fur.

"Words cannot express how proud Breezeflight and I are of you," Featherstar meowed warmly. "You have made WindClan proud, and have carried our Clan's legacy in safe paws."

The leader paused before continuing.

"And that is deserving of a warrior name," Featherstar meowed, twitching her whiskers at Nightpaw's surprised expression.

"Breezeflight, has your apprentice, Nightpaw, learned the skills of a warrior? Do they understand the importance of the warrior code?" Featherstar asked, fixing her green eyes on Breezeflight.

"She has," Breezeflight responded, a mixture of joy and pride gleaming in her eyes.

"I, Featherstar, former leader of WindClan, look down on this apprentice from StarClan. They have trained hard to understand the ways of our noble code, and I commend them as a warrior," Featherstar meowed, her voice steady as she gazed at Nightpaw.

"Nightpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your companions, even at the cost of your life?" Featherstar asked.

"I do," Nightpaw meowed confidently.

"Then with the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Nightpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Nightstorm. StarClan honors your determination and resilience , and we welcome you as a full warrior," Featherstar finished, stars dancing on her coat.

Featherstar rested her muzzle on top of Nightstorm's head, and the new warrior licked her former leader's shoulder.

"Nightstorm! Nightstorm!" The black she cat looked around and realised all of the cats in the clearing were chanting her new name.

Breezeflight licked her ear. "You have came so far, Nightstorm. Your parents would be proud."

"I wouldn't have been able to do it without you," Nightstorm meowed, touching noses with her mentor.

Dawnpaw closed her eyes, droplets from the stream falling from her whiskers. When she opened them, she was in the familiar territory of StarClan. She looked around, noticing that all of the previous clan leaders were present with a few other cats. One being the former black and white medicine cat of ThunderClan, Nightfall.

Dawnpaw purred and approached him.

"Hello Dawnpaw," her mentor approached her, touching noses with her. "How are you?"

The brown tabby's heart clenched with a mixture of sadness at all cats that had been lost and joy at seeing her old mentor again.

"I miss everyone," she meowed quietly. "But I've also met some amazing cats."

Nightfall grinned. "They can't be amazing as me, surely?" He joked.

Dawnpaw purred back, and nearly jumped out of her fur when Ivystar appeared next to her mentor.

"Ivystar! Where did you come from?" She yelped, giving her chest fur a few embarrassed licks.

The blue tabby twitched his whiskers in amusement. "I've been here the entire time."

Dawnpaw tilted her head to the side slightly. "Why are you here?"

"To watch your medicine cat ceremony, of course," Ivystar meowed, sitting down and wrapping his tail around his paws.

Dawnpaw blinked. "Normally only medicine cats watch."

"And normally the Clans aren't obliterated for the ceremony," Ivystar pointed out, before rolling his eyes. "As the last leader of ThunderClan, I *do* want to watch the last apprentice be granted their full name."

"Right after Nightpaw's made a warrior it'll be your turn," Nightfall told her, turning his gaze towards where the black she cat was standing in front of Featherstar.

After Nightstorm's ceremony, Dawnpaw yowled her new name. She thought it suited the black she cat.

"Nightstorm! Nightstorm!" She turned to see Emberpaw and Blizzardpaw doing the same.

"Well, without further ado, I think it's about time we do *your* ceremony," Nightfall meowed, raising his tail for silence.

"I, Nightfall, former medicine cat of ThunderClan, look down on this apprentice from the stars above. She has trained hard to understand the ways of a medicine cat, and will serve as one for many moons," Nightfall meowed, his voice being carried across the gathered cats.

"Dawnpaw, do you promise to uphold the ways of a medicine cat and to protect all cats equally, even at the cost of your life?" He asked, gazing at her unwaveringly.

"I do," Dawnpaw responded.

"Then with the powers of StarClan I give you your true name as a medicine cat. Dawnpaw, from this moment you will be known as Dawnbreeze. StarClan honors your intelligence and patience, and we welcome you as a full medicine cat," Nightfall finished, resting his muzzle on Dawnbreeze's head. Dawnbreeze licked his shoulder in turn, ears ringing from the chants of her new name.

"Dawnbreeze! Dawnbreeze!"

She looked around at Nightstorm, Emberpaw and Blizzardpaw. Even Blizzardpaw was chanting cheerfully, seemingly locked in a competition with Emberpaw on who could shout the loudest. Emberpaw seemed to be winning. Nightstorm had her tail raised in the air and her eyes were gleaming with happiness. Dawnbreeze's heart warmed. She may have lost many cats who were close to her, but she had found her best friends.

Emberpaw opened his eyes, gaze resting instantly on a ginger she cat. He looked around, pretending to not see her, and saw that Nightpaw, Blizzardpaw and Dawnpaw were greeting their former leaders and what seemed like their former mentors as well. But standing in front of Emberpaw was only one cat - one of the two cats he disliked the most.

"Duskstar," Emberpaw eventually meowed, approaching her.

"Emberpaw," his former leader responded coolly, dipping her head in greeting.

"Where's Smokefang?" He asked. It wasn't like he actually wanted to see his former mentor, but he was just wondering what was going on.

"Not here," Duskstar responded shortly and then decided to add. "And not in StarClan at all."

"He's alive!? I thought everyone was dead," Emberpaw's heart clenched as he remembered seeing his mother's dead body lying on the Thunderpath in the Twolegplace.

"He is not alive," Duskstar growled. "And I personally killed him with my own claws."

"Where is he then?" Emberpaw asked, and then realised where he must be a split second before Duskstar responded.

"The Dark Forest!" Duskstar lashed her tail. "He tried to kill me when the Twolegs burnt down the forest. He succeeded - I only had one life left - but he also died from the wounds I gave him shortly after."

"Oh," Emberpaw meowed. "I *did* try to tell you though."

Once, Emberpaw had overheard Smokefang talking to another ShadowClan warrior about how he wanted to overthrow Duskstar. Emberpaw had rushed to Duskstar's den and explained what he had heard but Duskstar didn't believe him, called Smokefang a 'loyal warrior' and told Emberpaw that he had probably just dreamed it. Not to mention the fact that she *let* Smokefang postpone his warrior ceremony for no reason whatsoever.

"Look, Emberpaw, I'm sorry for not listening to you, and you deserved to be a warrior when your brother was made a warrior," Duskstar meowed irritably, as if reading his mind. "And that is why you are going to be made a warrior today."

"Really!?" Emberpaw squeaked, giving an excited bounce, before remembering that that wasn't a thing apprentices done, never mind warriors.

Duskstar narrowed her eyes. "Don't make me regret this."

She flicked a ginger striped tail to where Nightpaw and Dawnpaw were standing in his left. "You have to wait for them two to have their ceremonies first."

"I don't mind," Emberpaw meowed, watching intently as Nightpaw became Nightstorm and as Dawnpaw became Dawnbreeze.

"Dawnbreeze! Dawnbreeze!" Emberpaw yowled as loud as he could.

He glanced across to Blizzardpaw, and saw the grey tabby give him a challenging glare. Emberpaw narrowed his eyes playfully as Blizzardpaw started yowling Dawnbreeze's name at the top of his voice and Emberpaw started shouting even louder.

Duskstar gave him a disapproving stare. "You're not a kit. You're about to be made a warrior."

Emberpaw met her gaze. "We were all kits once. Even you - at least I think."

Duskstar didn't respond, only flicked an ear and let her gaze travel across the assembled cats, who were now waiting for Emberpaw to become a warrior.

"Emberpaw's mentor is not present here. He was a disgrace to ShadowClan, and I'm honestly surprised that Emberpaw turned out the way he did," Duskstar started, whilst Emberpaw was trying to figure out if that was a compliment or not. "Despite Smokefang not being here, I can act as Emberpaw's mentor and say that he is by far ready for this warrior ceremony."

"I, Duskstar, former leader of ShadowClan, look down on this apprentice from the stars above. They have trained hard to understand the ways of our noble code, and I commend them as a warrior," Duskstar meowed confidently.

"Emberpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your companions, even at the cost of your life?" Duskstar asked.

"I do," Emberpaw mewed, trying not to wither under her intense gaze.

"Then with the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Emberpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Emberheart. StarClan honors your kindness and enthusiasm, and we welcome you as a full warrior," Duskstar finished, resting her muzzle on Emberheart's head.

Emberheart hesitated before licking her shoulder.

"Emberheart! Emberheart!" His friends were yowling his names, and he realised that he felt more at home with them then he ever did in ShadowClan.

Duskstar regarded him for a moment with her green eyes and shaking her head.

"I don't think I've ever given those two virtues to any ShadowClan cat before," she meowed. "I don't know how you managed to become the cat you are now, but what I do know is that you never really belonged in ShadowClan. Even so, you're the last surving ShadowClan cat, so at least pass on some of our knowledge."

"I will," Emberheart meowed. "And I'll never forget ShadowClan."

Blizzardpaw dipped his nose into the stream, sneezing as some water got into his nose. He closed his eyes, trying to remember what he done at the Moonstone. Oh yeah, he just opened his eyes and was randomly told a 'prophecy', as the others called it. He had serious doubts that it was going to work this time though.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes, taking in the scene before him. First, he was surprised that it actually worked. And secondly, the air was thick with the scent of prey, making Blizzardpaw's stomach growl. He pricked his ears as he noticed

what looked like all of the leaders of every clan and some other cats were assembled a few tail lengths away from him.

Blizzardpaw made his way over to Troutstar; the brown furred she cat was sitting on a rock at the end of the line of leaders.

"Hello, Troutstar," Blizzardpaw meowed warily.

His former leader dipped her head in greeting before leaping down from the rock.

"It's nice to see you, Blizzardpaw," she meowed. "As long as you don't bite my ear off."

"I wouldn't bite *your* ear off, Troutstar, because I'm pretty sure you would bite off both of mine in return," Blizzardpaw returned, as respectfully as he could.

"That threat didn't seem to stop you back-chatting me, though," a warm, deep voice meowed from behind him.

Blizzardpaw jumped as he came face to face with a white tom with a blue tabby face, paws and tail.

"Hailstorm! Where did you come from?" He asked his former mentor, trying to recover himself.

"Well, there's a perfectly good rock there that makes a very good hiding place," Hailstorm meowed, flicking his tail towards the rock that Troutstar was standing on previously.

"Oh ok," Blizzardpaw meowed awkwardly. He and his mentor never had the best relationship, but Blizzardpaw was pretty sure it was his fault, not Hailstorm's fault.

He shook out his grey tabby pelt as a long silence stretched between them. "Do you actually want to see me, or where you just forced to be here?" Blizzardpaw eventually asked.

Hailstorm looked mildly offended before meowing, "Why wouldn't I want to be here? You were my apprentice after all."

"I wasn't the *best* apprentice," Blizzardpaw mumbled.

"Someone has matured," Troutstar commented.

Hailstorm sighed. "You were a challenge, Blizzardpaw."

His former mentor paused.

"It's a good thing I like a challenge."

"And, speaking about that," Blizzardpaw hesitated, wondering how to say it. "I'm..... A bit... Sorry for being a 'challenge'."

"Is that you're way of saying, 'oh Hailstorm, I never appreciated you enough for all the hard work you put into mentoring me and only realised it because you're dead and I miss you so much'?," Hailstorm purred.

Blizzardpaw nodded his head sheepishly.

Hailstorm flicking his ear with a blue tail and meowed, "it's ok, Blizzardpaw. I forgive you and I miss the challenge of mentoring you."

Blizzardpaw pricked his ears as Featherstar started addressing the assembled cats. "What's going on?"

"You are all having your warrior ceremonies, and Dawnpaw's having her medicine cat ceremony," Troutstar explained.

His heart leapt in his chest and he listened as Nightpaw was given her new name: Nightstorm. He chanted her name with the others, with probably more enthusiasm than he had ever said anyone's name before.

When Dawnpaw's turn came along, Blizzardpaw noticed that Emberpaw was trying to be the loudest at chanting her new name, so Blizzardpaw narrowed his eyes and started to chant even louder. Emberpaw won the shouting match, but it gave Blizzardpaw a lightness in his chest he hadn't felt since the old territories had been destroyed, something Emberpaw had called 'the Great Destruction'.

When Emberpaw became Emberheart, Blizzardpaw's voice was honestly started to feel a bit hoarse, but he chanted his friend's name with as much enthusiasm he could muster at that point anyway, because he knew that Emberheart would do the same for him.

"Hailstorm, has your apprentice, Blizzardpaw, learned the skills of a warrior? Do they understand the importance of the warrior code?" Troutstar asked, her turquoise eyes gleaming.

"They have," Hailstorm meowed, nudging Blizzardpaw forward.

"I, Troutstar, former leader of RiverClan, look down on this apprentice from StarClan. They have trained hard to understand the ways of our noble code, and I commend them as a warrior," Troutstar meowed, gazing at Blizzardpaw intently.

"Blizzardpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your companions, even at the cost of your life?" The brown furred she cat asked.

"I do," Blizzardpaw meowed.

"Then with the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Blizzardpaw from this moment on you will be known as Blizzardfrost. StarClan honors your courage and skill, and we welcome you as a full warrior," Troutstar rested her brown muzzle on Blizzardfrost's head, and Blizzardfrost licked her shoulder.

"Blizzardfrost! Blizzardfrost!" His friends called from around him.

"Seems like you've made some very loyal friends," Hailstorm purred. "And Emberheart's 'enthusiasm' must have rubbed off on you a bit."

"What do you mean?" Blizzardfrost asked.

"I saw the way you were chanting *their* full names," Hailstorm teased.

Blizzardfrost opened his mouth to reply but was cut off by Duskstar.

"We have another task for you," the ginger she cat meowed.

"We know you have travelled far and are probably fed up with us by now, but we're presuming you don't want to be a random bunch of loners," Ivystar added before Duskstar could continue.

Duskstar narrowed her eyes before explaining what the task they wanted the newly named cats to do. "We think you should make a new Clan. One that teaches its apprentices the ways of all four clans, and is preferably in the territory you have discovered today, because we didn't lead you there for nothing."

Blizzardfrost dug his claws into the ground. First the StarClan cats told them to find this place without telling them what they were finding it for and now they're presuming that the last few cats from the Clans would actually *want* to do it. What annoyed Blizzardfrost even more was that they were right - he did want to do it.

"Of course you don't have to if you don't want to do it," Featherstar added. "But we think it's probably a good idea if you do."

Blizzardfrost glanced at Emberheart, who was the closest to him, and nodded his head. Emberheart returned the nod and Blizzardfrost saw Nightstorm and Dawnbreeze doing the same as well.

"So, speak up! Do you want to do it or not?" Duskstar meowed impatiently, as if all four cats hadn't just nodded their heads right in front of her.

"We do," Nightstorm meowed, her voice steady and controlled.

"Good," Duskstar flicked her tail, satisfied. "Obviously you'll have to make a camp, find cats to join the Clan, actually name the Clan, and find a leader for it along the way."

And with that, Blizzardfrost woke up.

Chapter 16

Nightstorm blinked in the sudden dawn light. She had just exited the tunnel behind Blizzardfrost, Dawnbreeze and Emberheart, none of them having talked after waking up.

"It's dawn," Nightstorm meowed. "We were in there longer than I thought."

"It's always like that with StarClan," Dawnbreeze replied. "And they always do the most unexpected things."

"Tell me about it," Blizzardfrost snorted. "First they give us some mysterious prophecy telling us to find this place, then they randomly give us our full names, and now they want us to just make an entire Clan!"

"We already have three warriors and a medicine cat," Emberheart pointed out. "It can't be that hard."

Nightstorm privately thought that it was going to be incredibly hard, but didn't voice her thoughts. Instead she tried to be optimistic.

"Where will we find cats willing to come with us that preferably doesn't turn our future Clan into a ragtag group of rogues?" Blizzardfrost asked, seeming to get more annoyed with the plan every passing second.

That sparked something in Nightstorm's mind.

"Well, we *have* met two cats who would make great Clanmates," she pointed out.

Dawnbreeze's eyes lit up and she pricked her ears. "Shadow and Spirit!"

"Of course! We have to take care of Spirit anyway and might as well ask Shadow as well," Emberheart meowed.

Blizzardfrost narrowed his eyes. "We should sort out other things like the camp and territory before getting Spirit. He'll only get in the way."

"That's a bit of a harsh way of putting it," Dawnbreeze paused before meowing, "But I think you are right."

Nightstorm nodded, flicking her tail decisively. "It would be a good idea to find a place for camp, and then mark the territory based off its location."

Her three companions, her new Clanmates, nodded, Emberheart doing so enthusiastically.

They waded through the swamp again, Nightstorm careful not to have any incidents with frogs again. Frogs. She shuddered. If the swamp was to become a part of their territory, she was going to avoid it like greencough.

"We need to come up with a name for our Clan," Dawnbreeze pointed out as they waded through the thick water.

Blizzardfrost nodded, hauling himself onto dry land with thick furred, muddy forepaws. Nightstorm followed, shaking her fur out as she exited the water. Emberheart hopped up neatly beside her.

"What about BirchClan?" The calico tom suggested, waving his tail at the silver birches around them. "After the silver birches."

Nightstorm tilted her head, considering it.

"That's a nice name for a Clan," she meowed. "And since no one seems to have any better ideas, my vote goes to BirchClan."

Dawnbreeze nodded in agreement. "I like it. The silver birches *are* a distinctive characteristic of this territory, after all."

Blizzardfrost rolled his eyes. "If you ask me, it's a bit simple."

Nightstorm raised her eyebrows, letting her yellow gaze rest on the tom beside her. "Do you have any better ideas, O Wise One?"

Blizzardfrost gave a huff of annoyance as a twig got tangled in his fur. He gripped the small, thin piece of wood between his teeth and yanked it hard, but it did not come loose.

"No," the tabby tom conceded, glaring at the twig through slitted eyes.

He tried yanking it again, but the resulting effect was it becoming more tangled in his long fur.

Emberheart made a noise that sounded like he was trying very hard to not laugh. Nightstorm twitched her whiskers in amusement and Dawnbreeze gave a soft purr from beside her.

Blizzardfrost growled, and Nightstorm nudged him. "I can help," she offered, slowly prising the twig out with her claws.

"Thanks," Blizzardfrost grumbled as the twig fell to the ground.

Nightstorm scanned the trees, determined to find a suitable place to make a camp. Blizzardfrost trailed after her, whilst Emberheart and Dawnbreeze chatted amiably behind them.

"There's a ridge," Blizzardfrost pointed out, nodding to the section of higher ground just in front of them.

Nightstorm leaped up onto the ledge, taking in the surroundings. In the direction that they had came, land stretched out, with silver birches spread evenly and a small river (which they had just walked past) wound its way through. In the distance, the swamp could be seen as a large murky blob.

"That river probably floods in leaf-fall," Blizzardfrost pointed out. "So having a camp up here would probably be a good idea."

Nightstorm glanced at the tabby tom beside her. The grey tabby tom could be pretty clever when he wanted to.

"Has getting your warrior name somehow matured you?" Dawnbreeze asked, twitching her whiskers slightly.

"I was mature anyway," Blizzardfrost defended himself, his tail lashing from side to side.

Nightstorm pricked her ears as she saw Emberheart standing quite a few fox lengths away from her, waving his tail animatedly. She bounded over, with Dawnbreeze and Blizzardfrost on her tail.

"What is it?" She asked, skidding to a halt beside the calico tom.

As Emberheart opened his muzzle to speak, the black she cat noticed what the tom had been pointing out. The land dropped away before her paws, forming a large depression in the ground. The perfect place for a camp.

"Do you think it would be suitable?" Emberheart asked hopefully, settling his warm amber gaze on her.

Nightstorm studied the hollow, picturing WindClan's old camp in the back of her mind. It seemed a similar size to her old camp, so it should theoretically work.

"Probably," the black she cat responded.

Dawnbreeze was the first one to venture into the hollow, slowly sliding down the edge and digging her claws into the rigid dirt. Nightstorm followed, skidding down to the bottom with Emberheart on her tail.

It was scattered with ferns and quite a few brambles, with even a small juniper berry bush growing in one corner.

"Juniper berries!" Dawnbreeze mewed excitedly, her light brown tail swishing from side to side. "It's used to treat bellyaches, coughs and breathing difficulties. When mixed with daisy or ragwort, it can even help with aching joints!"

Nightstorm couldn't help but smile at the medicine cat's enthusiasm. "We could build the medicine den around it," she pointed out.

Dawnbreeze's eyes lit up even further than they already had. "Yes! That would mean I wouldn't have to go out into the territory to find any juniper berries."

Blizzardfrost bent his head down, sniffing the ferns around them. "This place has been abandoned for a long time. I didn't smell any rogues on the way here, either."

Nightstorm shrugged. "They must all be in Twolegplace."

"Yeah, capturing innocent cats for no apparent reason," the grey tabby snorted.

Nightstorm rolled her eyes and swiftly changed the topic. "It'll need a bit of sorting out, but I think this place will work for a camp."

"So, we've got a location for the medicine den, but where will everything else go?" Dawnbreeze asked.

"I don't know. I guess we'll have to start planning."

Chapter 17

Author's note:
Thank you for 100 reads (at the time of writing)!!! I hope you are enjoying the book so far, but I don't know why you would still be around if you wasn't lol.

Anyway, without further ado...
I welcome you to chapter 17!

TIMESKIP - HALF A MOON

Nightstorm dug her claws into the base of a fern, wrenching it from the ground with one swipe. After removing so many from camp, she was getting good at it. To her left, Dawnbreeze and Emberheart were weaving previously unearthed ferns into a warriors'-den-shaped structure.

Emberheart trotted over to her, bending down and picking the fern up with his mouth. He then shoved the fern into a small gap at the base of the den.

"That was the last one!" The calico tom purred, waving his tail happily.

Nightstorm looked around her, and realised that he was right - the medicine den, apprentices' den and warriors' den was now finished, and only a few ferns and brambles dotted the camp floor.

She pricked her ears as Blizzardfrost started trotting through the newly constructed entrance to camp, two fish dangling from his jaws. Nightstorm has slightly warmed up to fish since arriving, but she still wouldn't eat one unless she was starving.

"Anyone want some fish?" Blizzardfrost mumbled, dropping the fish in the centre of camp.

"Sure," Emberheart bounded over, enthusiastically grabbing a fish by its tail. "Does anyone want to share?"

"I will," Dawnbreeze offered. "I'm starving."

Blizzardfrost looked at Nightstorm. "You hungry?"

"No," Nightstorm replied. "Not for fish, at least."

Blizzardfrost tilted his head in confusion. "You don't like fish?"

"It's alright, I guess," the black she cat meowed with little enthusiasm.

"I can catch something else for you," the tabby tom offered, turning back towards the camp entrance.

"No, it's fine. I'll go and catch something. The camp's finished now, anyway," Nightstorm insisted. "Anyway, since when did you care?"

The tom mumbled something incomprehensible, but he sounded embarrassed.

"Thanks for offering, though," Nightstorm meowed, flicking her tail against his flank before trotting out of camp.

A soft breeze ruffled her fur as she stepped out of the shelter of camp, and leaves squelched under her paws as she clambered down the ridge outside. The stream could be seen in the distance, with a few herbs growing around it. The leaves had a tinge of frost to them - a reminder that it was leaf-fall. She hopped over the stream, scanning the ground for signs of rabbits. They often liked to pass through there, and nibble at the herbs on the water's edge.

She opened her mouth, allowing the breeze to wash over her scent glands, bringing with it the smell of rabbit. This didn't seem to be the smell of an alive rabbit, though. It smelled freshly killed, as there was the sour tang of blood.

She shifted her gaze as a slight movement behind one of the birch trees caught her attention. A white cat tail stuck out from it, flicking from side to side softly.

Nightstorm slowly weaved through the birch trees, crouching low to the ground as she started to approach. She wiggled her haunches and sprung towards the cat, deftly pushing him away from the tree he was hiding behind and giving a long hiss as she did so.

She found herself looking into the narrowed blue eyes of a snow white tom.

"What in the name of StarClan do you think you're doing!?" Nightstorm growled, digging her claws into the Tom's shoulders.

The tom blinked. "Looking for you."

Nightstorm glanced at the rabbit that he held in his jaws. "Really? Because it looks like you're stealing prey to me."

The tom shrugged. "It's a gift. I got it from Twolegplace."

Nightstorm raised her eyebrows. "There are no rabbits in Twolegplace. If you had to lie, you could have tried at least a bit harder."

The tom shook his head. "This isn't like the wild rabbits outside Twolegplace. It doesn't have a white tail, and Twolegs keep them. I caught this one because the Twoleg released it into the Twolegplace."

Nightstorm inspected the rabbit, realising that it didn't have a white tail, just as the tom had said. "Why were you looking for me, then?"

"I heard that you were making a Clan, and I want to join," the tom meowed. "I'm Snow, by the way."

Nightstorm narrowed her eyes. "No you're not. You're a cat."

The tom rolled his eyes. "My *name* is Snow."

Nightstorm lifted her claws off his shoulders, stepping off him. "Oh, ok."

Snow scrambled to his paws, eyes wide with hope. "Can I join, then?"

Nightstorm surveyed him doubtfully. They had only just marked the territory and finished camp, so she wasn't even sure they were ready for cats to start joining yet.

"I don't know," Nightstorm responded eventually. "I'll have to check with the others."

Snow pushed the rabbit over to her. "You can have this."

She bent down to pick it up. "Follow me," she told him, flicking her tail before heading back to camp.

Nightstorm ducked into the tunnel, the white tom just behind her. Snow was looking around with awe at the barely finished camp. Blizzardfrost pricked his ears, and gave a low hiss as he saw Snow.

"Who's this?" Blizzardfrost growled, lashing his striped tail from side to side.

"He wants to join the Clan," Nightstorm shrugged, dropping the rabbit at the tabby's paws. "He brought a gift."

Blizzardfrost sniffed the rabbit warily. "It smells weird," he mewed doubtfully.

Nightstorm looked up as Dawnbreeze and Emberheart came over. "Is it a new recruit?" Emberheart asked excitedly.

Snow nodded enthusiastically. "I'm Snow," he dipped his head formally. "Can I join?"

Blizzardfrost snorted. "Absolutely no-" He began to say, but was cut off by Dawnbreeze.

"Why not?" The light brown tabby meowed. "We need cats to join anyway, and this is the perfect opportunity."

Nightstorm glanced at Snow, and realised that it was incredibly unprofessional to be arguing in front of him.

"Let's go and discuss this near the medicine den," Nightstorm meowed as Blizzardfrost opened his mouth to argue with Dawnbreeze. "Snow, just stay there for a minute."

"And don't do anything," Blizzardfrost growled, unsheathing his claws. "Or you get to say hello to my claws."

Snow sat down in a docile manner, dipping his head respectfully. "I would never do anything to a group of such legendary cats."

Nightstorm walked over to the medicine den, waving her tail for the others to follow her. Both Dawnbreeze and Emberheart looked relatively excited, whilst Blizzardfrost was looking back to give a warning growl to Snow.

"Calm down - he hasn't even done anything yet," Dawnbreeze rolled her eyes, sitting down with her tail curled neatly over her paws.

"He *could* do something, though," Blizzardfrost hissed, blue eyes narrowed to slits.

Nightstorm sighed. "He seems friendly enough to me, but I don't know if we're ready for cats to start joining yet."

"We need to get cats to start joining at some point, and the camp and territory are sorted out anyway, so we should be ready," Emberheart pointed out. "We might not get another opportunity like this."

Blizzardfrost dug his claws into the soft dirt of camp. "I would not feel comfortable having a rogue roaming around camp," he hissed through gritted teeth.

"I don't think he's a rogue. He doesn't have many scars, and he looks quite well fed," Nightstorm meowed, looking over to the white tom.

"He's a kittypet, then," Blizzardfrost growled. "That's just as bad! He doesn't have what it takes to be a warrior!"

"Half of the cats we will be taking into the Clan will probably be kittypets. Besides, he managed to catch that rabbit," Dawnbreeze meowed calmly.

"He could be trying to poison us!" Blizzardfrost meowed, tail lashing from side to side once more.

"He's not trying to poison us, and I think we should give him a chance. If he isn't suited to being a warrior, he could either try being a medicine cat or leave," Nightstorm meowed firmly. "Not every cat from Twolegplace is out to capture, or kill, us."

Blizzardfrost sheathed his claws. "Fine."

"Is everyone else still open to him joining?" Nightstorm checked, glancing at Dawnbreeze and Emberheart.

Both cats nodded, and Dawnbreeze got to her paws. "Let's go and tell him, then," the tabby meowed decisively, trotting over to the white tom.

Snow stood up, his tail flicking from side to side nervously.

"Welcome to BirchClan," Nightstorm grinned.

Chapter 18

Nightstorm bent her head down to nip the fragile stems of watermint growing near the stream. She carefully added it to the pile she had helped Dawnbreeze gather, and realised that Dawnbreeze was still talking.

"-And when chewed into a pulp, it can be used to treat bellyaches," the brown tabby was explaining, waving her tail excitedly. "Are you even listening?"

Nightstorm pricked her ears. "Mm," she replied over a mouthful of watermint. Upon dropping it, she meowed, "you were explaining the uses of watermint."

Dawnbreeze flicked an ear, satisfied. "We have enough herbs collected now. It's important to gather them before leafbare because the cold will kill quite a few off."

Nightstorm nodded, noticing the frosty edge to the air around her for the first time. She shuddered under her pelt as a somewhat morbid thought crossed her mind - leafbare always brought death in the Clans. Would their Clan be any different?

Dawnbreeze gave a sideways glance at her, and paused before picking up the watermint. "I'm sure everyone will do fine in leafbare. After that, it'll be newleaf, and we'll feel the sun warm our backs once again," she mewed cheerily.

Nightstorm raised her eyebrows. "I didn't know the power of reading minds came in the medicine cat package," she gave a light purr.

Dawnbreeze grinned. "We always have to be able to tell if our patients are telling us the full extent of their symptoms," she explained. "So I guess it does."

Nightstorm had to admit, she admired Dawnbreeze's passion for her

role. Then again, if you were willing to give up your freedom to love to StarClan, you sort of had to be dedicated.

They headed back to camp with their jaws full of the herbs, Nightstorm resisting the urge to spit the foul-tasting herbs out of her mouth. She followed Dawnbreeze into the medicine den, looking around the dim shade of the space.

Nightstorm hadn't been in there before, as she had been focused on the building of the warriors' den instead, and it was impressive. Small piles of various herbs lined deep scratches in the dirt walls at the back, in an array of colours and scents.

"I see you've been busy," Nightstorm commented, flicking her tail towards the herb piles.

Dawnbreeze shrugged. "It's my job," she pointed out.

Nightstorm pricked her ears as loud hisses sounded from outside the medicine den. She bounded out in a few leaps, narrowing her eyes at the sight before her. Snow and Blizzardfrost were crouched low to the ground, facing each other in the middle of camp, with backs arched and fur on end.

"You pick your prey last!" Blizzardfrost was growling, spitting furiously at the white tom.

"B-but-" Snow glanced anxiously at Nightstorm, eyes wide with fear.

Nightstorm walked over, standing between the two hissing toms. "What's going on?"

Blizzardfrost straightened up, his fur flattening slightly. "I just went hunting, and this *rogue* tried to take a fish that I had brought back!" He meowed indignantly.

Nightstorm narrowed her eyes. "And what's wrong with that?"

"He shouldn't be able to eat first," Blizzardfrost stated, lashing his tail slightly

Nightstorm sighed. "Snow is as much a part of this Clan as everyone

else, Blizzardfrost. If you bring back prey for the Clan, he is allowed to take it; there is no order."

"He doesn't even have a warrior name, for StarClan's sake!" Blizzardfrost spat.

"He is still a part of this Clan," Nightstorm meowed firmly. "Besides, just because Shadow and Spirit have loner names, do you hold them in any lower regard?"

Blizzardfrost's eyes fell to the ground, studying his snow-white paws. "No," he conceded.

Nightstorm stepped slightly away from the two toms, so that Blizzardfrost could now face Snow directly. "What do you have to say to Snow, then?"

Blizzardfrost's eyes up, glancing at Nightstorm before resting his ice blue gaze on Snow's own blue gaze. "Sorry, Snow. You are part of this Clan, and I shouldn't have treated you like you aren't," he mewed, somewhat sincere, but from his tightened jaw, Nightstorm could tell he didn't like it.

Blizzardfrost's tabby tail stilled slightly, calming to a slight flick whilst he picked up the fish between his jaws. "You can have this," he meowed to Snow, dropping it at the other tom's paws.

"Thank you," Snow meowed, dipping his head respectfully. "I would love it if you could teach me how to catch fish, and then I would be able to contribute more to the Clan."

Blizzardfrost tilted his head, his eyes narrowing ever so slightly. "Maybe I'll teach you sometime."

Snow picked up the fish, settling in a corner of the camp to eat it. Emberheart then came trotting into camp and, upon seeing Snow eating the fish, quickly dropping his frog on the small fresh kill pile and making his way over to the white tom.

"I don't trust him," Blizzardfrost murmured, flicking his tail to where Emberheart and Snow were talking animatedly.

Nightstorm raised her eyebrows. "I know - you make it pretty obvious. But you should really give him a chance."

She flicked his tail lightly over his flank. "Anyway, I was thinking we should bring Spirit, and possibly Shadow, to the Clan today."

Blizzardfrost pricked his ears. "Good idea."

"I was discussing it with Dawnbreeze whilst we were collecting herbs, and she suggested that some of us should stay in camp with Snow," she meowed.

"I'll stay," Blizzardfrost growled, flexing his claws. "I'd like to keep an eye on him."

Nightstorm looked doubtfully at the tom's long, unsheathed claws. "Are you sure?"

Blizzardfrost followed her gaze, quickly sheathing his claws. "I'm sure. You can leave some other cat with me. Actually, I'll ask Emberheart if he doesn't mind staying - he seems to be having a great conversation with Snow right now."

Nightstorm looked over to where the calico tom was conversing with Snow. Emberheart seemed to be telling a story, every once in a while doing a few actions to demonstrate what was happening.

"You can go and ask him then, if you don't mind interrupting his amazing storytelling," she mewed, nudging Blizzardfrost gently.

"Sure," Blizzardfrost shrugged, trotting over to the two toms.

Nightstorm jumped up onto a tall fence, claws scrabbling for a hold on the smooth wood. Dawnbreeze stood next to her, lean body easily balancing on the narrow frame.

"Where should we start?" Nightstorm asked, glancing back at the birch forest they were heading away from.

"I guess we can check out the patches of grass at the back of Twoleg

dens," Dawnbreeze suggested, flicking her tail at the neatly boxed off patches of grass around them.

Nightstorm nodded, slowly padding along the fence they were standing on. "It would be more efficient if we split up, but it's definitely a lot safer if we stay together."

"Yeah," Dawnbreeze agreed, and they both pricked their ears as a frenzy of barking sounded in the distance.

They continued padding along narrow strips of fence until the sun started to dip slightly in the sky, and Nightstorm looked up in dismay.

"We'll have to get back s-" she was cut off by loud growling coming from the direction a few Twoleg dens over.

Nightstorm narrowed her eyes, and Dawnbreeze voiced her thoughts. "That doesn't sound like a dog." The brown tabby mewed, starting to pad in the direction of the sound.

"If you lay a claw on him, you will be sorry that your flea-ridden, dung-filled, mangy pelt ever existed!" A familiar voice was growling.

Both she cat's pricked their eyes at the voice, bounding over, whilst still precariously balancing on the fence. Below them, a large, long furred tortoiseshell she cat was cornering two cats - a smoky black she cat and a small flame point tom.

Chapter 19

Nightstorm didn't hesitate, and leaped down on top of the large tortoiseshell. She dug her claws into the long fur of the cat beneath her, wrapping her dark paws around the cat's neck and pinning her to the ground. She found herself looking into two bright amber eyes.

"Hey, kitty," the tortoiseshell she cat purred. "You do know that I can easily get you off me, right?"

Nightstorm narrowed her eyes, inspecting the muscles rippling beneath the she cat's long fur. The she cat also had the size advantage - Nightstorm felt small in comparison.

"Why don't you get me off you, then?" Nightstorm growled, pressing her claws against the she cat's throat.

"Because I don't want to." the she cat rolled her eyes. "Obviously."

Nightstorm blinked. "That makes no sense."

The she cat purred in response. "A lot about me, and where I come from, doesn't make any sense, kitty. For example, I was told to go out and capture some cats to either add to our ranks or kill for entertainment. What's the point of that when we already have enough cats in our ranks, and watching them get brutally murdered is hardly any fun?"

The she cat paused before continuing. "Anyway, I don't *really* want to capture these cats, so it would be appreciated if you gave me a few deep wounds so that I have an excuse not to."

Nightstorm stepped off the she cat carefully, but didn't sheath her claws. "No."

The she cat blinked, as if surprised. "Why not?"

"I don't know where you come from, or why your group kills cats

for entertainment, but I am not harming a cat who refuses to defend herself," Nightstorm meowed firmly.

The she cat leaped to her paws. "Would you rather us fight it out, then? Getting us both injured in the process? Or would you prefer me to take those cats that I was originally going to capture anyway?" She challenged, her long claws gleaming in the light of the setting sun.

Nightstorm nearly jumped out of her fur as a cat appeared by her side, smoky black fur reminiscent of the long shadows behind them.

"New option: how about *I* give you a few wounds to remember?" Shadow growled, flexing her claws impatiently.

The she cat fixed Shadow with a hard amber stare. "I don't care who does it. As long as someone gives me an excuse to return empty-pawed, I'll take it."

The tortoiseshell she cat crouched low to the ground, seeming to brace herself as Shadow leaped on top of her, wrestling her to the ground with ease. Nightstorm flinched as Shadow ran her claws down the she cat's flank, the she cat gritting her teeth as blood pooled on the ground around her.

A squeal pierced the air.

Nightstorm whipped around, watching as Dawnbreeze slapped her tail across Spirit's wide blue eyes, licking his ear comfortingly.

She turned back around as she saw Shadow stepping off the she cat, satisfied. Two large scores down the side of the tortoiseshell's flank wet the fur around it, turning it a deep red colour. A few more scratches dotted the long fur of the she cat, and she winced slightly as she got to her paws.

"Thanks for that," the she cat meowed, beginning to turn towards the fence. "If we ever meet again, the name's Tiger."

Tiger leaped up the fence, groaning with the effort and practically dragging herself up the smooth wood, leaving long streaks of blood behind. "I should hope we don't meet again, though. If you were

paying attention, kitties, meeting you again would mean capturing you and taking you to my group. My group is not a nice place to be."

Those ominous words were left in the air as Tiger jumped down to the other side of the fence, and lingered long after she had gone.

"Did you really have to do that Shadow? In front of Spirit?" Dawnbreeze broke the silence, looking at Shadow doubtfully.

"Nice to see you again too, Dawnpaw," Shadow replied, padding over to Spirit and laying a tail softly on his shoulder.

Dawnbreeze opened her mouth to correct Shadow, but closed it again as Shadow started speaking to Spirit.

"That mange pelt's gone now, Spirit. Everything's fine," she murmured softly.

The small kit, who had his eyes tightly closed, opened them at these words. "You didn't kill her, did you?"

Shadow snorted. "Of course not."

Nightstorm nudged Shadow gently, glancing at the rapidly setting sun."We're here to offer Spirit the chance for us to look after him."

Shadow instantly rested her green gaze on Nightstorm's yellow gaze, eyes holding something akin to panic.

"You are?" The smoky she cat asked, voice tightly controlled.

Dawnbreeze nodded. "We're making a Clan and, since we're technically supposed to be looking after Spirit, we have came to offer him a place," she explained. Upon seeing Shadow's look of increasing panic, the brown tabby added, "and we've also came to offer you a place."

Shadow breathed a sigh of relief, before glancing down at the kit beside her. "It would be... Safer, for us to join your little makeshift Clan," she muttered after a short silence. "As just demonstrated by that rogue, it's not the most protected out here."

Spirit shifted slightly, eyes widening at the conversation. "You mean that if we join this Clan, there'll be no more rogues attacking us and stealing our scraps? Will it be like the Clans Shadow says in her stories?" He squeaked, tail flicking from side to side.

Dawnbreeze nodded, smiling softly. "I don't know if it'll be like the old Clans, but it'll certainly be a lot safer than out here."

Nightstorm glanced at the darkening sky again, kneading her paws against the ground impatiently. "We really must get going," she meowed. "I don't feel like hanging around Twolegplace at night."

Shadow nodded. "The worst rogues come out at night. We'll come with you, if Spirit wants to, that is."

All eyes turned to the small kit, who was looking around nervously. At last, he nodded. "Twolegplace can be scary sometimes," he squeaked. "I don't like it."

Nightstorm nodded in response, turning back the way they came. "Let's go, then. I'll explain what's happened since we left you on the way."

Nightstorm padded into camp, moonlight casting shadows on the ground. Shadow and Spirit padded behind her, with Dawnbreeze taking up the rear.

Inside camp, Blizzardfrost was sitting erect at the entrance to the warriors' den, watching over the sleeping form of Snow. Emberheart was also asleep, his Calico pelt rising up and down peacefully.

Blizzardfrost pricked his ears and stood to his paws as the group approached. "You're back," he meowed, sounding somewhat relieved. "You were out for quite a while."

Nightstorm shrugged. "We ran into some trouble with a loner. Do we have any spare nests for Shadow and Spirit?"

Blizzardfrost nodded, glancing towards the two afore mentioned cats. "I made them whilst you were gone."

"And Snow helped." A voice sounded from behind the tabby tom, and Emberheart came into view, blinking sleep from his eyes. "Honestly, the tension between you two is so high that I'm sure some of the leaves on the trees fall off from it." He twitched his whiskers in amusement as Blizzardfrost opened his mouth to respond.

"I'm sure that was some lovely bonding time, but I'm not sure about anyone else, but I'm exhausted, so let's just get to our nests," Dawnbreeze yawned, cutting off whatever Blizzardfrost's response was going to be.

Blizzardfrost growled underneath his breath, but shut his mouth, and instead pointed with his tail towards two freshly-made nests. "Well those nests are the result of the 'bonding time', so enjoy, Shadow and Spirit."

Shadow rested her green gaze on Blizzardfrost. "Thank you, Blizzard*paw."*

She brushed past him, Spirit by her side, and Emberheart quickly followed. Blizzardfrost turned to Nightstorm. "Did nobody tell her that we got our warrior names?"

"We did tell her - I think she's just making fun of you." Nightstorm purred as Blizzardfrost stiffened, eyes turning towards where Shadow was now lying down in a nest.

"Just wait until she gets up in the morning," Blizzardfrost growled, and Nightstorm got the impression that he was only half joking.

She rested a tail on his shoulder. "Before you exact your revenge, it would be a good idea to get some sleep," she pointed out.

Blizzardfrost turned his gaze to Snow, who still lay asleep. "I think I'll stay awake."

Nightstorm followed his gaze. "He's not going to try and murder us in our sleep, you know. Besides, I don't think you would appreciate it if you woke up to find Snow staring unnervingly at you."

Blizzardfrost blinked. "I guess not," he sighed, starting to pad over

to his nest. "I am quite tired, anyway."

Nightstorm carefully stepped over the sleeping form of Snow, curling up into her own nest. Surrounded by the soft breathing of Blizzardfrost on one side and Emberheart on the other, she quickly succumbed to sleep.

Chapter 20

Nightstorm sat with her tail curled neatly over her paws, surveying the group before her. Shadow was staring right back at her, confidence gleaming in her green eyes, whilst Spirit sat next to the smoky she cat, kneading his paws against the ground nervously. Snow sat next to them, flicking his tail from side to side slightly.

"We have gathered you here for a test," Dawnbreeze, who was seated next to her, began. "Well, Shadow and Snow are going to do a test. We are going to watch both of you hunting, and assess how much we need to teach you, if we need to teach you anything at all."

"Failing the test doesn't mean that you won't be able to join the Clan," Emberheart added. "It just means that you'll have a bit of learning to do."

Nightstorm stood up. "Besides, we all have some learning to do. I can catch rabbits, but not fish, for example."

Her gaze flicked to the stream, where Blizzardfrost could be just about seen through the trees fishing. The tom had claimed that he had 'no interest in watching two cats fail miserably whilst trying to catch prey.' However, Nightstorm privately thought that it had something to do with one of the two said cats being Snow, especially since they already knew Shadow could hunt anyway.

"What am I going to do?" Spirit squeaked.

"Blizzardfrost is going to teach you how to fish!" Emberheart replied, pointing his tail towards the stream.

"Cool!" Spirit replied, buzzing with a new energy. "When can we start?"

Dawnbreeze smiled slightly at the young tom. "Now, if you want."

They watched Spirit bound through the trees, and Nightstorm turned to Shadow and Snow as she saw him reach Blizzardfrost.

"Snow will be hunting that way," Nightstorm paused and flicked her tail towards the birch forest. "And Shadow will be hunting that way." This time, she pointed her tail towards the swamp. "At about sunhigh, you will switch areas, so Snow will be hunting in the swamp, and Shadow in the forest. Understand?"

Both cats in front of her gave a firm nod.

"You may start, then."

The cats bounded off in the two different directions, Shadow's pelt blending in with the murkiness of the near swamp and Snow's blending in with the bright white of the birch trees.

"Who wants to keep an eye on Snow?" Dawnbreeze broke the silence, nodding towards where the tom had went.

"I will," Emberheart offered.

The calico tom nodded a farewell before bounding after Snow, mouth slightly agape to follow the scent trail.

"One of us will have to stay with Blizzardfrost to make sure he treats Spirit... nicely, and the other can follow Shadow," Dawnbreeze meowed. "I should probably stay with Blizzardfrost because I'm not that good at tracking."

Nightstorm nodded in agreement. "I'll follow Shadow, then."

"Are you sure you don't want to spend more time with Blizzardfrost?" Dawnbreeze teased, flicking her tail lightly over Nightstorm's shoulder.

The black she cat felt her fur heating up with embarrassment.

"I'm sure." Nightstorm rolled her eyes and bounded off on the trail that Shadow had taken before Dawnbreeze could say another word.

Nightstorm crouched low to the ground, belly fur soaking into the slightly flooded ground of the swamp. She shuddered as the water seeped into her fur and the mud squished between her claws.

She narrowed her eyes as a smoky black pelt came into view, tail raised slightly above the ground. Shadow's long belly fur was coated with mud, but the large she cat continued to slink through the murky water, barely making a ripple.

Nightstorm blinked in surprise. She knew that Shadow was a good hunter, but she didn't know Shadow was *that* good.

The dark she cat paused, eyes locked onto something. Nightstorm followed her gaze, realising that Shadow had spotted a frog. It was swimming in the water at a surprisingly quick speed, long legs darting in and then back out. Occasionally, it would stray to the surface, where the water broke around it and the sun reflected of its slimy back.

Shadow crouched down until the water came up to her shoulders, and pushed off in quiet pursuit of the frog. Her tail swished from side to side gently as she paddled, barely making a sound.

Without warning, her legs pushed out forcefully, and she grasped the frog in her forepaws, quickly biting the back of its neck.

Nightstorm stepped back slightly, impressed. She had no idea if it would be impressive to Emberheart, who actually hunted in the swamp, but Shadow seemed quite knowledgeable on how to catch frogs.

Nightstorm glanced up at the sun, realising that it was sunhigh. She carefully picked her way over to Shadow, painfully aware of how loud she sounded compared to the older she cat.

"Well done," Nightstorm congratulated. "It's time to hunt in the forest now."

Shadow dropped the frog on a small piece of drier land next to them. "What do you want me to do with that?"

Nightstorm followed her gaze to the frog. "I'll take it."

She bent down to pick up the frog, and just about heard Shadow swishing away.

Nightstorm grimaced as the slimy skin of the frog slipped between her teeth, trying to stop herself gagging from the taste. She splashed back through the shallows, breathing a sigh of relief as she reached the firmer ground of the birch forest.

She pricked her ears as she saw a patched pelt making her way towards her through the trees.

"Hey," Emberheart meowed as he reached her, dropping a small mouse that he had been carrying. "How did Shadow do?"

"She caught this frog," Nightstorm dropped the frog to the ground next to Emberheart's mouse. "And she moved very silently through the water; the frog didn't see or hear her coming."

Emberheart nodded. "With a dark pelt like hers, it's easy to blend in. I am impressed that she was quiet though."

"So was I," Nightstorm agreed. "How did Snow do?"

Emberheart pointed his tail towards the mouse he had dropped. "His hunting crouch was perfect, and he pounced at the right moment. He even checked the wind direction before going after it."

"I didn't know he was that good at hunting," Nightstorm meowed.

Emberheart shrugged. "Anyway, we better get going."

Nightstorm nodded. "I'll take that mouse back."

Nightstorm watched as Shadow caught a squirrel and a mouse. As the sun began to dip behind the trees, she came out of her hiding place.

"Nice catches," Nightstorm grinned as she padded over to Shadow. "I'm sure you know this already, but you passed."

Shadow nodded, eyes gleaming. "I had to pass just to save myself from the embarrassment that I would experience if I didn't."

Nightstorm purred. "You done great. Don't ask me how you managed to swim through the water so quietly, but that was amazing."

They padded back to camp, the catches dangling from Shadow's jaws. As the entered, Spirit jumped up from where he was talking to Blizzardfrost and Dawnbreeze and bounded over.

"Shadow! Blizzardfrost taught me how to fish!" He mewed excitedly. "Is that a squirrel? I love squirrels!"

Shadow gave a soft purr. "Why don't you and I share this squirrel, then, and you can tell me all about your day."

The smoky she cat dropped the mouse in the centre of camp before padding over to the edge of camp, lying down next to Spirit.

Nightstorm trotted over to Blizzardfrost and Dawnbreeze, waving her tail in greeting.

"How did it go?" Dawnbreeze asked as she approached.

"Shadow easily passed," Nightstorm grinned. "She caught one frog, a squirrel and a mouse, with perfect technique for each kill."

Blizzardfrost opened his mouth to reply, but stopped as he saw something over her shoulder.

"He's late," the tabby tom growled.

Nightstorm turned around, watching as Snow and Emberheart padded into camp. A fish dangled from Snow's jaws.

Nightstorm turned back to Blizzardfrost. "It's a longer walk back to the swamp than the forest."

Blizzardfrost narrowed his eyes. "He didn't come from the swamp. He came from the stream." He pointed his tail to the fish that Snow was laying beside Shadow's mouse. "That type of fish isn't found in

the swamp."

Emberheart then padded over, amber eyes gleaming. "Snow didn't catch anything in the swamp but, on the way back, he saw some fish in the stream and caught one!"

"Are we going to call that a pass?" Blizzardfrost asked. "The task was to catch something from the swamp, not the stream."

Dawnbreeze rolled her eyes. "*Of course* we're going to call it a pass. The task was to catch prey, and he caught prey."

"We all have something to learn. Everyone knows I can hunt and provide for the Clan, but I wouldn't be able to catch something in the swamp either," Nightstorm pointed out.

"Fine," Blizzardfrost huffed. "I'll go and tell him."

Just like that, Nightstorm watched as the grey tabby made his way over to the white tom. They started talking, and Snow's blue eyes lit up with joy.

Emberheart shook his head. "I really don't understand Blizzardfrost sometimes."

Chapter 21

Nightstorm sighed as she felt the hard, narrow frame of the wooden fence in Twolegplace beneath her paws. Back here again. This time, though, she wasn't here to try to get to the other side, or recruit cats that she already knew. Today, she was going to go around and ask if any kittypets or loners wanted to join the Clan.

"Where should we start?" Emberheart asked from beside her.

Nightstorm shrugged. "I don't know."

Emberheart started going right, towards a large patch of grass with sweet smelling herbs bordering it.

"Let's go this way," the calico tom decided, hopping down from the fence and onto the grass.

Nightstorm followed, trying to detect any cat scents underneath the scent of the herbs. She couldn't find any.

They continued on, jumping up and back down many fences in their search. It was only when the sun was at its peak in the sky that they met their first mildly interested cat.

Nightstorm landed in a patch of grass next to Emberheart, who was watching a cat sitting alone a few tail lengths in front of them. The cat was a tabby cream tom with blue eyes, and was currently lounging around in the sunshine, unaware of their presence.

Nightstorm cleared her throat, the noise painfully loud against the otherwise peaceful atmosphere.

The tom jumped a tail length into the air before turning around to greet them.

"Oh, hi, I didn't see you both there," the tom chuckled nervously, shuffling his paws.

Nightstorm looked over the tabby, noting his round belly and soft pelt. This was clearly a well-fed kittypet, about six moons old.

"We're from the birch forest not too far from here," Emberheart told him.

"You're from the forest!?" The tom squeaked excitedly. "You actually live there?"

Emberheart nodded, whiskers twitching in amusement. "We're trying to build a Clan there."

"A group of cats who live together and help each other out," Nightstorm added after the tom looked slightly confused.

"We were wondering if you wanted to join," Emberheart meowed.

"Well," the young tom shuffled his paws again. "What is it like out there?"

At least the tom didn't jump into things without knowing what they involved.

"It is much harder than the life you have here. You will be expected to hunt for your Clan and defend it against outside threats. In leafbare, food is scarce, and nights are cold. You are more likely to die out there then you are if you stay with your Twolegs," Nightstorm warned bluntly.

"But it also has it's benefits," Emberheart meowed brightly. "Fresh kill tastes a lot better than the food you have to eat here, and you have freedom. You can feel the wind through your fur as you weave between the birch trees, and feel the exhilaration of a good hunt."

The tom's gaze flitted nervously between the two cats. "I have always wanted to be free..." He paused. "My Twolegs keep me inside most of the time, so I hardly ever get to see Hazel, my friend. She keeps telling me that we should run away to somewhere, but we've never known where to go."

"If you were planning on going anyway, a Clan would probably be a lot better - you would receive protection," Nightstorm told him.

The tom nodded. "I guess... But I don't really know if I even *want* to go."

"No one's forcing you. You can always try it out for a few days if you want," Nightstorm offered.

The tom tilted his head to the side, considering it. "I don't know yet. I'd have to talk to Hazel."

Emberheart nodded in understanding. "Well, if you ever decide to come and find us, we're in the birch forest over that way." He pointed his tail in the rough direction of their territory.

"Okay," the tom meowed. "The name's Dune, by the way."

"Nice to meet you, Dune. I'm Emberheart and this is Nightstorm," Emberheart meowed in response. Then, he added, "cool name."

Dune pricked his ears. "Thanks! A traveler once told me that dunes are found in a place full of sand as far as the eye can see."

Emberheart tilted his head in confusion. "I thought sand was only found in rivers."

Dune shook his head. "I guess not."

Nightstorm glanced up at the sun. "Anyway, we better get going. I hope we see you again, Dune."

"Bye." Dune waved his tail in farewell as they hopped onto the fence.

Emberheart turned to Nightstorm, amber gaze meeting her yellow one.

"Where to now?" Emberheart asked.

Nightstorm scanned the visible patches of grass in front of them and, beyond that, the Thunderpath. Next to the Thunderpath, a long haired grey tabby tom could just be seen walking with a tortoiseshell she cat.

"Meet up with Blizzardfrost?" Nightstorm suggested.

Emberheart nodded. "Let's hope he's had more luck than we have."

Nightstorm narrowed her eyes at the grey smudge in the distance. "It looks like he has."

They trotted through the patches of grass once more, leaping over the wooden fences dividing them. She paused as they prepared to leap down from the final fence. The tortoiseshell cat with him looked oddly familiar.

"Hi, Nightstorm, Emberheart," Blizzardfrost nodded to each of them in turn.

Nightstorm locked gazes with the tortoiseshell she cat.

"Oh, it's you," the tortoiseshell she cat meowed.

Nightstorm racked her brains for her name. That was it. Tiger.

"It's you," Nightstorm snarled back.

Blizzardfrost and Emberheart looked between the two she cat, trying to figure out what was going on.

"You two have met?" Emberheart meowed, clearly confused.

"When Dawnbreeze and I went to get Spirit and Shadow, we found *this cat* attacking them," Nightstorm spat.

"I had to! You don't understand how I have to live!" A flash of anguish in Tiger's gaze was quickly replaced with anger. "You have no idea what it's like, having to capture cats and watching them die for 'entertainment'."

Emberheart looked at Tiger in horror. "You have to do that?"

"Yes," Tiger growled. "And I want to escape from it. That's why I want to join your little Clan."

Blizzardfrost was gazing at Tiger with rare sympathy in his icy blue

eyes.

Nightstorm looked at Blizzardfrost through narrowed eyes. He didn't trust Snow, who had done nothing wrong, yet he trusted this she cat who had tried to attack Shadow. That tom would never make any sense.

"I don't trust you," Nightstorm meowed sharply.

Emberheart turned to Nightstorm. "We can give her a chance, though, right? It sounds terrible where she lives."

Blizzardfrost responded instead. "If we do take her in, someone's going to have to keep an eye on her," he growled. At least he was still approaching this situation warily.

Nightstorm opened her mouth to say 'no, she is most definitely not joining the Clan' when she saw the scars criss-crossing Tiger's pelt, the fresh wounds hidden beneath thick fur, the haunted look in her eyes. This cat needed saving, whether Nightstorm trusted her or not.

"Fine," she growled. "You can join."

While Tiger's amber gaze lit up with hope, Nightstorm was still wondering if she had made the right decision. If she hadn't, the whole Clan could collapse.

Chapter 22

Nightstorm watched Tiger as the other she cat trotted into camp, a small mouse dangling from her jaws. She appeared to be settling in well, and knew a few things about hunting, but Nightstorm still didn't trust her.

Blizzardfrost appeared by her side, following her gaze. "You have no right to tell me off for not trusting Snow when you clearly don't trust Tiger," the tabby pointed out.

"I actually have a reason to not trust Tiger, though," Nightstorm meowed, not taking her gaze off the tortoiseshell she cat.

"I *also* have a reason to not trust Snow."

"Really?" Nightstorm dragged her gaze away from Tiger and settled it on Blizzardfrost instead. "What is it?"

"My gut." Blizzardfrost shrugged.

Nightstorm opened her mouth to speak, but was cut off as an unfamiliar smell reached her nose. She pricked her ears.

"Who's that?" she asked as the source of the scent trotted into camp.

Emberheart ducked through the entrance first, and following him were two cats, who looked to be kittypets. In fact, Nightstorm *knew* one of them was a kittypet because she had seen the cream tabby tom before. Dune. Next to him padded a young brown spotted she cat with sharp green eyes. She walked with a sense of confidence in herself, with her tail raised high in the air.

Nightstorm stood up, walking over to the two kittypets as they stood gazing around the camp in wonder. Blizzardfrost followed, his eyes bright with interest, and Dawnbreeze quickly bounded over to join them.

"Hello," Emberheart greeted them with a wave of his tail. "We have

some new recruits."

Blizzardfrost narrowed his eyes before jerking his head at coloured bands around the 'recruits' necks. "What are they?"

The spotted she cat gazed at the warrior before looking down at the coloured band as if she had only just realised it was there. "Oh, that's my collar."

"Collar?" Blizzardfrost curled his lip in disgust.

"Yes, it's something that the housefolk put on us to show that we belong to them, I guess," the she cat shrugged.

Before Blizzardfrost could say anything else, Nightstorm pointed out, "If you want to join us, you have to get rid of any marks of Twolegs."

The she cat glanced down at the coloured band. "Gladly." With one swipe of her claws, she tore the collar in two with more aggression than Nightstorm had expected, throwing it down on the ground. She looked at Nightstorm. "Happy now?"

The black she cat gave a firm nod, looking towards Dune to see if he would do the same. His blue eyes widened slightly when he saw that her gaze was resting on him, and he nervously reached a paw towards his neck. He swallowed and tugged at it slightly, and then tugged a bit harder, until it eventually broke and landed on the ground.

Dawnbreeze was the first to speak. "So, what are your names?"

The brown she cat was the one who responded. "I'm Hazel, and this is Dune." She flicked a tail towards the tom in question. "He looks like a bit of a scaredy mouse, but he's great at tracking."

Dune ducked his head sheepishly. "And you're great at hunting. You're the only housefolk cat in town that can hunt, and I've never seen you miss a catch!"

"We'll see about that," Blizzardfrost grunted.

"As long as you prove your worth, you can stay with us. We'll test you tomorrow, and then we will officially welcome you!" Emberheart mewed brightly.

"...Test?" Dune mewed.

"Oh, it's nothing to worry about, we just want to see your weaknesses and strengths. Shadow, Tiger and Snow have all done theirs," Dawnbreeze reassured.

Nightstorm thought back to Tiger's test, which had only happened a few days ago. The she cat had done exceptionally well in the forest, but had lots of difficulty navigating the swamp.

"Nightstorm, do you want to show them where to make their nests?" Emberheart asked, his amber gaze boring into hers.

"Sure." Nightstorm nodded, signalling the two cats to follow her with a sweep of her tail.

She headed towards the empty apprentices' den, as they were both young enough to be apprentices anyway. She ducked inside, her eyes adjusting to the dimmer light.

"You can use this den. Nobody else sleeps in here, so you have a den all to yourselves," Nightstorm told them as they both filed in. She pointed her tail to a couple of mossy nests that she had made when building the den. "You can sleep in any of the nests in here."

Hazel's green eyes sparkles in the shade of the den. "Great! I claim this one!" She mewed, jumping into a nest near the back of the den, scattering some of the moss in it.

Dune padded over to her, quietly helping her put the moss back together.

"I'll be outside," Nightstorm told the two young cats. "When you're ready, you can come outside and we'll introduce you to everyone."

Nightstorm padded into the clearing, heading over to where Blizzardfrost, Dawnbreeze and Emberheart were talking together quietly. Dawnbreeze pricked her ears at the sound of her pawsteps

approaching.

"Nightstorm! We need to talk to you!" the medicine cat meowed.

Chapter 23

The black she cat bounded the last few tail lengths, coming to a halt at the edge of the group. "What is it?"

"Warrior names!" Dawnbreeze mewed excitedly.

"What?" Nightstorm blinked, confused. They already had warrior names.

"We should ask if the cats who have joined us want to have Clan names," Dawnbreeze explained.

Nightstorm tilted her head to the side, considering it. If they were to make a Clan, it would make sense to have many of the same traditions they used to, to make them more of a Clan than a bunch of loners. Then again, was it fair to make cats change the name that they have had their entire lives? Nightstorm supposed it wouldn't hurt to give them the option.

"That's a good idea," Nightstorm meowed eventually. "Who's going to name them, though?"

"You three," Dawnbreeze jabbed her tail at Emberheart, Blizzardfrost and Nightstorm.

"Yeah, and I was just explaining how it wasn't fair that Dawnbreeze doesn't get to name anybody," Blizzardfrost meowed irritably.

Dawnbreeze shrugged. "I don't mind - don't forget, I was the one who suggested it. Besides, it makes sense that the warriors should name the warriors. If someone joins who wants to be a medicine cat, I can name them."

"What about Dune, Hazel and Spirit? They're not old enough to be warriors yet," Emberheart pointed out.

"We can make them apprentices - they're all about six moons old," Dawnbreeze meowed. Clearly the medicine cat had thought the

entire thing through.

"I think we should wait a while for Dune and Hazel to get settled in first and, if we're not making them apprentices yet, it would make sense for Spirit to wait as well," Nightstorm meowed.

The other three cats nodded their agreement.

"I'll name Snow," Emberheart offered.

Blizzardfrost glanced at Nightstorm. "I'll name Tiger." She guessed he knew she wouldn't want to name the one cat she didn't trust completely.

"I'll name Shadow, then, if they all agree, that is," Nightstorm meowed.

"Who's going to make the announcement of the potential new names and of Hazel and Dune joining us?" Blizzardfrost asked.

For some reason, all three cats decided to look at Nightstorm.

"Fine, I'll do it," she muttered.

Nightstorm turned around and padded towards a small boulder in the edge of the clearing, leaping to the top of it. Dawnbreeze, Blizzardfrost and Emberheart followed, until all four cats were standing next to each other on the rock.

"Everyone! We have an announcement to make!" Emberheart yowled.

Hazel and Dune turned from where they were talking to Snow, and Shadow, Spirit and Tiger padded forward to hear what they had to say.

"First, we would like to welcome Hazel and Dune to BirchClan," Nightstorm meowed, nodding towards the two young cats. "They seem to have promising skills, and I'm sure they will bring much to our Clan. Their tests will be tomorrow."

"Hazel! Dune!" Emberheart chanted from beside her. The chant

spread rapidly across the hollow until every cat seemed to be changing the two cats' names.

Nightstorm waited for silence before she continued. "Shadow, Snow and Tiger, we were wondering if you wanted warrior names with two parts, like ours. You don't have to if you don't want to, but we thought that it would be nice if you did."

She watched the three cats as they considered her proposition.

"Sure, I'll do it," Shadow meowed. "You'll be giving us the names, correct?"

"Yes, unless you want to choose your own," Nightstorm told her.

"I'll see what you give me and decide if I like it," Shadow shrugged.

Nightstorm set her gaze on Tiger next, who looked like she was about to speak. The tortoiseshell matched her gaze, staring unblinkingly at her.

"I'll do it as well," Tiger meowed. "I want a fresh start. Just don't give me a bad name."

Snow nodded. "Same here. I want to experience all aspects of Clan life."

Nightstorm jumped down from the rock, padding towards Shadow. "Shadow, do you promise to hunt for and defend your Clan, even with your life?" She asked, staring deep into Shadow's green eyes.

"I do," Shadow replied, a glimmer in her eye as she responded.

"Then, from this day forward, you shall be known as Shadowstrike." Nightstorm leaned forward and touched noses with Shadow.

"Nice name. I approve," Shadowstrike grinned, flexing her claws.

"Shadowstrike! Shadowstrike!" The cats in the hollow chanted her name, raising their voices to the sky.

Nightstorm turned to Emberheart, flicking her tail to signal it was

his turn. The calico tom padded towards Snow, whose blue eyes were gleaming with excitement.

"Snow," Emberheart meowed as he reached the white tom. "Do you promise to hunt for and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Snow lifted his chin, blue gaze matching Emberheart's unwaveringly. "I do."

"Then, from this day forward, you shall be known as Snowflight," Emberheart meowed, touching noses with Snowflight.

"Snowflight! Snowflight!" Nightstorm raised her voice in a yowl, chanting with everyone else.

Blizzardfrost landed with a thump on the ground behind her, padding towards Tiger.

"Tiger," Blizzardfrost greeted. "Do you promise to hunt for and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Tiger swallowed, raising her head to meet Blizzardfrost's stare, though not quite as confidently as the other two cats had. Nightstorm once again hoped she'd made the right decision in letting the she cat into the Clan.

"I do." Tiger's voice rang throughout the clearing.

"Then, your name shall now be Tigerflame. Leave the past behind you, and you shall become an asset to the Clan," Blizzardfrost meowed.

"Tigerflame! Tigerflame!"

An unbidden thought rose into Nightstorm's head. What would happen if Tigerflame didn't leave the past behind her?

Chapter 24

Nightstorm watched through some brambles as Dune lowered himself into a wonky hunting crouch, tail waving wildly in the air and gaze fixed upon a mouse. The mouse sat up, quickly glancing in Dune's direction before scrabbling away. In a desperate attempt to catch the small rodent, the cream tom launched himself towards the mouse, but his paws caught nothing but empty air.

"Mouse dung!" He hissed, staring in the direction that the mouse had ran off in.

Nightstorm pushed herself out of the bramble bush, the sharp spikes clinging to her fur as she made her way into the clearing.

"Remember, Dune, this is about seeing what you know. It doesn't matter if you can't do something - we'll just teach you it," Nightstorm reassured as she disentangled herself from the bush.

"I know, but everyone else probably done way better on their tests," Dune meowed, tail drooping.

Nightstorm finally pulled free of the bush, padding over to the young tom and resting a tail on his shoulders. "Yes, but they're a lot more experienced than you," she pointed out.

Dune shrugged. "I guess. But what about Hazel?"

Nightstorm thought back to the confident spotted she cat she had seen padding into camp, and remembered Dune telling her that Hazel had always wanted to live as a wild cat. It would make sense if she knew a bit about hunting.

"Stop comparing yourself to others," Nightstorm meowed firmly. "Everyone has to start somewhere, but having the determination to get your end goal is what truly matters. As long as you try your best, no one can judge you."

Dune nodded in agreement, though some doubt still remained in his blue eyes.

"Let's get back to camp," Nightstorm meowed, flicking her tail on the direction of camp.

Nightstorm nodded to Tigerflame as she trotted into camp, Dune bounding over to Spirit to tell the small tom about his test. She narrowed her eyes as Tigerflame stood up from where she had been sat at the edge of the camp and started trotting towards Nightstorm.

"Hello, Nightstorm," Tigerflame greeted as she approached. "I need to talk to you."

"What is it?" Nightstorm asked, trying to keep the hostility she felt towards the she cat out of her voice.

"When on patrol, me and Snow found some fox scent near the border with Twolegplace. It seemed like it was only passing through, but we should keep a look out in case it decides to come back," Tigerflame told her.

"Oh, ok. I'll spread the word across camp then," Nightstorm replied.

Tigerflame's amber eyes sharpened to slits and her fur fluffed up slightly. "Are you saying that you don't trust me to spread the word myself?"

Great. If it wasn't bad enough that Nightstorm didn't trust Tigerflame in the first place, now the whole camp probably knew about it. She saw Dune and Spirit watching the conversation whilst pretending to talk to each other on the other side of camp, while Shadow had stopped outside the tunnel through which she had just entered, not making any effort at all to disguise the fact that she was eavesdropping.

"N-no, it's not that!" Nightstorm spluttered. She gave her black pelt a few licks in an effort to smooth it down. "I just thought I would help. If you want to do it yourself, I won't stop you."

Nightstorm felt like that last part was probably true - if she was speaking to any other cat, she would have helped. Then again, she felt like Tigerflame knew that she didn't trust her from the start, and was just using this as an excuse to confront her about it.

"Look," Tigerflame meowed, lowering her voice to a whisper. "I know you don't trust me, and I don't blame you. I just want a chance. A new start. Please."

On that last part, Tigerflame's voice had a tone of desperation, making Nightstorm feel almost sorry for the she cat. Almost. She still couldn't forget that Tigerflame had tried to 'capture' both Shadowstrike and Spirit, who was just a kit, when they first met each other. Nightstorm was willing to give her a chance, though. Whatever won the others over was clearly working on her, because Tigerflame genuinely seemed like she was trying to have a fresh start.

"You're right. I think we got off on the wrong paw," Nightstorm told her, studying the tortoiseshell she cat. "Why don't we both spread the word across camp to keep an eye out for the fox?"

Tigerflame nodded in agreement, turning to pad over to Shadow. Blizzardfrost and Hazel had appeared in camp at some point, at the grey tabby caught Nightstorm's eye. She trotted over to him.

"You were having an argument about who should warn everyone about a fox on the territory? Seriously?" The tabby twitched his whiskers in amusement. "I thought you were better than that."

"It wasn't about the fox," Nightstorm meowed defensively. "Well, it was, but it was much deeper than that. It was more about trust."

Blizzardfrost sat down, curling his tail over his paws. He seemed to have found the entire ordeal hilarious.

"You should have seen your face when Tigerflame accused you of not trusting her," Blizzardfrost grinned.

"Shut up," Nightstorm meowed, giving him a playful cuff on the ear. "You can hardly talk. At least *I* sorted out my trust issues."

Blizzardfrost huffed in response. "You got me there." He paused, and quickly changed the topic. "Anyway, that argument saved you a job. Now the entire camp knows about the fox."

Nightstorm looked across camp to see that Tigerflame had realised the same, instead choosing a fish off the fresh kill pile and trotting away to eat it with Emberheart.

"You seem in a good mood today," Nightstorm meowed, turning back to him.

"Am I not allowed to be in a good mood?" Blizzardfrost asked, but Nightstorm continued staring at him until he gave a proper answer. "I caught a rabbit today."

Nightstorm was momentarily confused, until she realised that, considering he came from RiverClan, he had probably never caught a rabbit before.

"Great!" She meowed. "But I thought you were meant to be testing Hazel."

"I did test Hazel, but we finished early, so I went hunting," Blizzardfrost responded. Seeming to read Nightstorm's mind, he added, "Hazel can do a basic hunting crouch but her techniques need some work."

"Sounds like she done better than Dune. He couldn't do a hunting crouch," Nightstorm told him. "That's fine, though, we can just teach him it."

Blizzardfrost nodded. "We should probably go and talk to the others about how Dune and Hazel done. Then we can make them and Spirit apprentices."

Nightstorm stood up, gesturing Blizzardfrost to follow her as they padded over to Dawnbreeze. Emberheart pricked his ears and followed shortly after. It was time for the first apprentices of BirchClan to have their ceremony.

Chapter 25

"Dunepaw! Hazelpaw! Spiritpaw!" The names of BirchClan's first apprentices rung in Nightstorm's ears as the Clan raised their voices into chant, howling into the orange - tinted sky. They had decided the new apprentices would not be mentored by any one cat - instead, the whole group would have training sessions together, in an effort to fill in the gaps in knowledge of everyone in the Clan whilst also building trust. They would also learn basic healing, which Dawnbreeze had insisted upon.

"I'm going to be the best warrior ever!" Hazelpaw yowled, pouncing onto a leaf.

"You've only just been made an apprentice, and you're already starting to think about becoming a warrior," Nightstorm purred.

Hazelpaw grinned at her. "That's because now I can't wait to become a warrior!"

Nightstorm watched as the young apprentice leaped onto Dunepaw's back, engaging in a play fight.

"When's the first training session going to be?" Emberheart mewed excitedly, amber eyes gleaming as much as the three young apprentices'.

"Tomorrow, I suppose," Nightstorm meowed, and the others nodded in agreement. "Should we just do it on basic hunting techniques, like how to stalk a mouse?"

Emberheart and Dawnbreeze nodded once again, but Blizzardfrost frowned.

"Fishing should be one of the first things everyone learns. Me and Snowflight seem to be the only ones capable of doing it, and it'll prove useful in leafbare," he huffed.

"So... You're going to teach everyone to fish!?" Emberheart asked, waving his tail in anticipation.

Blizzardfrost scowled. "If I have to."

"You was the one who offered," Nightstorm pointed out. "Anyway, you do have point. Leafbare is coming in fast, and it's better if everyone in the Clan is prepared for when it does."

Nightstorm's claws sank into the damp grass, which was wet with morning dew, dripping perfectly clear water droplets onto the black fur of her paw. The moistness of the ground next to the river made her shudder, but she figured that she'd get used to it.

She was sat on the bank of the river that ran through the territory, and, looking down it, she could see the other members of the Clan spread out at intervals. She was at the end of the row, with Dunepaw on her right, meaning that she would be the last one to be taught the wonders of fishing. Blizzardfrost was slowly making his way along the row on her side of the river, and Snowflight was doing the same on the other.

"Nightstorm?" Her ears pricked up at the sound of her name.

"What is it, Dunepaw?" She turned towards the cream tom beside her.

"What if I can't fish?" the young tom asked, looking up at her nervously.

"That's the whole point of this lesson, Dunepaw, so that you'll know how to fish by the end of it," she meowed, nudging the tom reassuringly.

"I know, but what if I'm so bad that I actually can't do it, even after this lesson?" he asked, voice quivering. "Will I be kicked out the Clan?"

A snort came from behind them. "Of course you won't. We've already went to the effort of officially making you an apprentice

now, so that would have been a complete waste of time if we just decided to kick you out. No one can instantly be perfect at something, it just takes time."

Nightstorm turned to face the grey tabby that had just joined them. "Look at you, being nice for once," she teased.

Blizzardfrost rolled his eyes and squeezed in between them, pointing to the river with his paw. "Now shut up and listen. The first thing to know about fishing is that it takes patience. You need to let the fish come to you, which is quite a lot different than actively looking for other prey, such as a mouse, when hunting. You need to crouch down and keep very still."

Blizzardfrost lowered himself into a crouch and Nightstorm and Dunepaw done the same. Blizzardfrost gently nudged Dunepaw's haunches until he was in the correct position.

"Good. Now, when you see a fish-shaped shadow in the water, I want you, Dunepaw, to try and catch it. You need to stick your paw out and sink your claws into it, before it can slip out of your grasp," he meowed firmly. "Also, both of you, make sure to not cast your shadows on the water."

"Can't you show us how to catch it first?" Dunepaw asked tentatively.

"No. There's not an endless supply of fish," Blizzardfrost growled before slinking away.

Nightstorm stared at the ever-changing reflections of the birch tree on the water, hoping for something to disturb them. Her paws quickly became numb and her legs stiff from crouching there for so long, but her companion hadn't given up yet, so she wasn't going to either.

Her concentration was broken by a large splash as Dunepaw's paw shot into the water, coming out with a smooth, silver scaled fish caught in his claws. Nightstorm shook the water droplets of her whiskers.

"Well done, Dunepaw!" She meowed, privately wondering how the tom had spotted the fish before her.

The apprentice puffed out his chest in pride, setting his catch down on the bank. Blizzardfrost came bounding over.

"You actually caught something," the tabby meowed, inspecting the fish with one paw. "Take this back to camp - you're done for the day."

Dunepaw picked up the fish in his jaws and bounded towards camp, Hazelpaw, with a minnow in her mouth, running to catch up with him.

"It looks like two of our apprentices have caught something," Nightstorm commented, turning to Blizzardfrost. "If I didn't know any better, I would think you were proud."

"I guess it's just nice knowing that I don't have an *entirely* negative impact on everyone's lives," he grunted, turning away from her, but not before she saw the glimmer of sadness in his eyes.

Nightstorm paused. "You don't have a negative impact on *my* life. And I don't think you do on anyone else's either."

Blizzardfrost gazed thoughtfully at the river. "If we hadn't been forced together from the literal destruction of all four Clans, would you have wanted to be my friend?"

"I don't know," Nightstorm admitted. "But what I do know is that the Blizzardfrost sitting next to me right now *is* my friend, and I am glad about that. I wouldn't choose any other cat to be forming a new Clan with than you."

Blizzardfrost set his icy blue gaze on her. "I don't know if I deserve to be friends with you, Nightstorm, or any of the others, but I promise that I'll try to be as good a friend to you as you are to me."

He stood up. "Now, get back to fishing."

Author's Note

Thank you for 1k reads! I really appreciate everyone who has stuck with me through the unreliable updates (unfortunately I can't promise that they will get more reliable but I'll try my best!)

[image]

Chapter 26

Nightstorm stared at the flowing water in front of her, trying to look in its shadowy depths for any signs of life. She'd been trying intermittently for a quarter moon now. And still no luck.

"Maybe you should just give up?" Blizzardfrost suggested after yet another fish had slipped out of her claws.

"No!" she snapped, and then paused. "Sorry. I just *can't stand* not being able to do something."

"You don't need to be perfect at everything, Nightstorm," the tabby responded, standing up with a swish of his tail. "Why don't you focus on hunting something else instead?"

Nightstorm glared at him, but Blizzardfrost matched her gaze with an icy blue stare. "Fine," she huffed, standing up to follow him.

"You can teach me how to hunt rabbits better if you want. Or we can go and help out with the apprentices' training," he meowed back at her.

Nightstorm smiled. "Why are you being so nice today?"

Blizzardfrost tilted his head to the side. "What do you mean?"

"It's just that-" she paused. "You usually seem *angry* at the world."

"I realised that there was no point in being *angry* at the world, as you put it. I-I realised that I was actually pretty happy with my life right now, and I should try to enjoy it," he mumbled.

Nightstorm glanced at him. "Should we go and help train the apprentices?"

"Sure."

Hazelpaw knocked Dunepaw down to the ground for the fifth time, pinning his shoulders down so that he couldn't move. Blizzardfrost padded over to them.

"Hazelpaw, get off," he growled. "For the last time, you're meant to be practicing the front paw blow, not engaging in a full fight."

"I did win though, right?" The brown she cat checked, hopping off Dunepaw.

Nightstorm nudged Dunepaw to his paws, picking a leaf out of his fur.

"I'm useless at this!" The sandy tom meowed despairingly, flopping onto his belly.

"No, you're not. If Hazelpaw would actually give you a chance to practice, I'm sure you would do great," Nightstorm meowed firmly, nudging him to his paws again.

"Fine, fine, I will," Hazelpaw meowed, rolling her eyes. "Go on, Dunepaw, attack me."

Dunepaw bounded forward, hesitating before gently pushing his paw down on Hazelpaw's head.

"You've got to do it faster than that! And harder as well!" Hazelpaw complained.

"W-well I didn't want to hurt you," Dunepaw mumbled, blue eyes shining with hurt.

"Hazelpaw! It is not your place to criticise Dunepaw," Nightstorm meowed firmly.

"It's not my fault that I'm better than him," Hazelpaw pointed out.

"She is right, though," Blizzardfrost murmured in Nightstorm's ear.

"Oh, for the love of StarClan, will both of you shut up?" Nightstorm said sharply.

"Sorry," Hazelpaw mumbled, her ears flattened against her forehead.

"It's fine," Nightstorm sighed. "Spiritpaw will probably be a better sparring partner for Dunepaw than Hazelpaw. Blizzardfrost, can you go and find Spiritpaw to see if he's up for some fighting practice? He should be in the forest hunting with Tigerflame. Take Hazelpaw with you - she can go hunting instead."

Blizzardfrost nodded, signalling with his tail for Hazelpaw to follow. Nightstorm watched them pad away.

"Are you okay?" Nightstorm asked Dunepaw, whose ears were drooping with sadness.

"Yeah.. I guess," he mumbled. "I don't think I'm ever going to be good at fighting."

"Dunepaw, look at me." Nightstorm meowed, gazing at the apprentice as he lifted his eyes to meet hers. "Anyone can get better if they practice."

"Maybe," the tom replied doubtfully.

"Anyway, you don't have to be *great* at fighting, just enough to defend yourself. The only reason you're learning offensive moves is because part of defence is offence."

Dunepaw's ears pricked and he gazed at something in the distance. "They're coming."

"You spotted them before I did," Nightstorm told him, and it was true. "We all have our strengths and weaknesses."

Spiritpaw looked nervous. The poor tom had his tail between his legs and was quivering slightly.

"Are you sure you want to do this, Spiritpaw?" Nightstorm asked. "You don't have to if you don't want to."

"N-no. I want to know how to defend myself. Even if it means going out of my comfort zone," the small tom squeaked.

"That's a great mindset, but seriously, nobody's forcing you."

"No, I'm sure," Spiritpaw replied, attempting to put on a brave face.

Blizzardfrost looked down at the young tom. "I told him that if Dunepaw hits him so hard that he gets a concussion, at least he'll get out of training for a while."

Nightstorm gave him a hard look.

"I was trying to comfort him!" Blizzardfrost meowed. "But I think I just made it worse."

Nightstorm rolled her eyes before turning to the two apprentices.

"By the way, I saw Snowflight on the way here, and apparently he needs me for something, so I guess I'll see you later," Blizzardfrost told her.

"Bye then," Nightstorm meowed, before addressing Spiritpaw. "Right, Spiritpaw, today we are practicing the front paw blow, which involves bringing your paw down on the opponent's head. Claws sheathed and don't do it *too* hard. Remember, this is only practice."

Spiritpaw nodded shakily.

"Ok, Dunepaw, Spiritpaw will try it on you first, and then you can swap," Nightstorm told them. "Into positions."

Nightstorm watched as Dunepaw sat down in the middle of the clearing, and Spiritpaw paced around him, crouching low to the ground. Suddenly, the small tom darted forward, hitting Dunepaw on the head before darting away again.

"Ah! That was quick," Dunepaw meowed, sitting back on his haunches and shaking his head.

"It was," Nightstorm agreed. "Good technique, Spiritpaw."

Spiritpaw puffed his chest out with pride, looking considerably less nervous than before.

"Now, Dunepaw, you try. Circling and darting in might work better for you than going in straight away."

Dunepaw then repeated the same technique that Spiritpaw had used on him, if not slightly clumsier.

"Good. Now let's try pairing that with a defensive move."

Nightstorm padded into camp, the two exhausted apprentices trailing behind her. Despite being covered in scraps of leaves, their eyes shone with pride, and she watched as they bounded over to Hazelpaw, no doubt to boast about their achievements.

"They look happy," Tigerflame meowed from beside her. "How did training go?"

"Pretty well. We had a...rough start, but they've both improved in skill and confidence," Nightstorm replied.

"Wasn't Blizzardfrost supposed to be training them as well?"

Nightstorm stopped. "Snowflight wanted his help. Isn't he back yet?"

Tigerflame narrowed her eyes. "No. I saw Snowflight whilst hunting with Hazelpaw and Blizzardfrost wasn't with him."

"Do you know what Snowflight needed help with?"

Tigerflame shook her head. "When I saw him, he was catching fish in the stream. He must have caught something, because the water was a bit red."

Tigerflame gave a long inhale.

"Snowflight isn't back yet either," the two she cats realised together.

"No, no, it can't be, I'm sure they're both fine." Nightstorm drew a panicked breath, pacing up and down in front of the entrance tunnel to camp. "They'll be back soon. They were just fishing." But nothing could stop the feeling in her gut that something was *very*

wrong.

"It's unusual for them to be back so late. It's going dark," Tigerflame pointed out, gazing at the orange hues of the sky that were slowly fading to black.

Tigerflame rested a tail on Nightstorm's shoulders. "Nightstorm, we need to go and find them. Now."

"Right. Yes." Nightstorm gasped in a few breaths of the fresh night air, trying to calm down. But panic had gripped her mind, laid siege to logic, and she found herself running out of camp, into the night, praying to StarClan that she was wrong.

Chapter 27

"Blizzardfrost! Blizzardfrost!" No reply.

Nightstorm could hear pawsteps pounding after her, struggling to catch up. "Nightstorm, for the love of the stars, slow down!" Tigerflame yowled.

Nightstorm slowed to a halt, allowing the large tortoiseshell to catch up with her.

"Right," Tigerflame gasped. "We need to think about this strategically. Running blindly through the night isn't going to help anyone."

Nightstorm nodded numbly.

"I last saw Snowflight near the ridge above the stream, not far from the edge of the territory. We should check there-" Tigerflame was cut off by the sound of approaching pawsteps.

"What's going on?" Shadowstrike and Emberheart asked in unison.

Nightstorm stared at them.

"We think... Something might have happened to Blizzardfrost," Tigerflame explained.

"What about Snowflight? I haven't seen him at camp either," Shadow asked, eyes narrowing with concern.

"We... Don't know," Tigerflame meowed hesitantly. "Anyway, just to be on the safe side, one of you should go back to camp in case anything attacks."

Emberheart's ears pricked. "You think something might attack camp? What in the name of StarClan do you think has happened?"

"It doesn't matter. Just go," Tigerflame growled.

Emberheart nodded and pounded away, back towards the direction of camp.

"You think Snowflight attacked Blizzardfrost," Shadowstrike stated.

Tigerflame ignored her. "Nightstorm, you can check the border near the ridge, I will check the ridge, and Shadowstrike, you can check the stream."

Nightstorm nodded again, ears ringing. She found herself sprinting towards the border, leaping over any fallen trees or vegetation in her way. She skidded to a halt.

No.

It couldn't be.

She had to be wrong.

"Blizzardfrost!" A cry escaped from her at the scene in front of her.

The grey tabby tom lay on the ground, blood clotting around a deep gash in his side. The fur around it was matted, stained with red.

She padded forward, touching her nose to his forehead. "Blizzardfrost," she whimpered.

His eyes flickered open for a brief second, before closing again.

"Nightstorm! Is everything all right? We heard- Oh, mouse dung!" Tigerflame hissed as she skidded into the clearing, Shadowstrike bounding after her.

"Is he-"

"Barely."

"Shadowstrike, go and get Dawnbreeze."

Nightstorm sat next to Blizzardfrost, watching the imperceptible movement of his chest rising and falling. The wound had been

cleaned and patched up, and now all they could do was hope.

"What happened?" Dawnbreeze asked from the other side of the den, putting away various different herbs that she had used.

"I don't know," Nightstorm muttered. "Something to do with Snow."

"You think Snowflight attacked him?"

"I do believe *Snow* attacked him, yes," Nightstorm growled.

Dawnbreeze paused. "Why do you think he done it?"

"No idea." Nightstorm sighed. "Blizzardfrost never trusted him. I should have listened."

Dawnbreeze trotted over, sitting down next to Nightstorm and resting her tail on Nightstorm's shoulders. "It's not your fault."

Nightstorm glared at her.

Dawnbreeze glared back.

"You should get some rest. It's been a long day." Dawnbreeze paused as Nightstorm continued glaring at her. "There's nothing else we can do for Blizzardfrost now," she meowed quietly.

Nightstorm sighed and nodded. "Fine."

She touched her nose to Blizzardfrost's fur before exiting the den, making her way over to the warriors' den. Tigerflame intercepted her before she was halfway there.

"What do you want me to tell the Clan? Because you wouldn't believe the rumours that the apprentices are making up," the large she cat asked, gazing at Nightstorm with concerned amber eyes.

"Just tell them that Blizzardfrost has been attacked and gravely injured, but, as far as the apprentices are concerned, *we don't know by what.* Tell the warriors everything," Nightstorm told her.

"Are you sure we shouldn't tell the apprentices as well? Their

current theory is that Blizzardfrost was attacked by a group of lions. Also, if they see Snow, they won't know to avoid him," Tigerflame pointed out.

"They're staying in camp until Blizzardfrost wakes up and tells us what's going on. It's too dangerous for them to go out right now."

"Ok." Tigerflame nodded.

Nightstorm ducked into the warriors' den. It was empty. No doubt everyone was wanting to know what was going on. She probably should have been the one explaining what had happened to the Clan, but she just wanted to sleep. Maybe then she would wake up and it would all turn out to have been a nightmare.

Nightstorm woke that morning to the crushing disappointment that it wasn't, in fact, a nightmare. She blinked the sleep out of her eyes before getting to her paws, shaking moss out of her fur. Shadowstrike was already up.

"How did you sleep?" The older she cat asked as she made her way out of the den.

"Terribly," Nightstorm muttered in response. "What about you?"

"Not great either. There's something mildly unsettling about a duplicitous murderer being on the loose," Shadowstrike admitted.

Nightstorm glanced worriedly over to the apprentices' den. "You really should keep your voice down."

Shadowstrike rolled her eyes. "It's *fine*. They can't hear me."

Nightstorm sighed. "Do you want to go on a patrol? I was planning on doing a quick check of the territory and try to see if we can pick up any traces of Snow."

Shadowstrike nodded. "I would love to get my claws on that traitorous fleabag, if that's what you mean."

Nightstorm gave her pelt a few licks to get the last scrap of moss out of her fur before padding out of the tunnel, Shadowstrike in tow. She nodded to Emberheart, who was guarding the entrance, and quickly set off towards the border near where she found Blizzardfrost. Blood still stained the ground from last night, the stench covering up any scent trail that Snow might have left.

"We can check by the stream. That was where Tigerflame saw him washing his paws, wasn't it?" Shadowstrike suggested, wrinkling her nose at the pool of blood on the leaves.

"Good idea." Nightstorm nodded, pushing through the bushes bordering the clearing and emerging near the stream. She followed it downstream, trying not to think about how they had had a group training session there a few days before, instead focusing on picking up any traces of where Snow might have been.

She stopped around the place Tigerflame must have seen him, nose to the ground in search of *anything*.

"You're acting like a dog," Shadowstrike pointed out. "They track scents like that."

Nightstorm huffed. "I don't care as long as I find *something."*

They didn't find anything. Even after searching all day, all they had found was a small speck of blood on the ground from when Dawnbreeze had stepped on a thorn whilst gathering herbs. Snow was clearly adept at the art of disappearing.

Chapter 28

Nightstorm sat next to the stream, watching as it trickled past her paws. She squinted at the murky water, waiting for even the slightest disturbance. Tigerflame sat next to her, looking like she was more interested in sitting in her nest.

Nightstorm scowled at the water. "I don't understand how anyone can actually enjoy this."

Tigerflame shrugged. "You was the one who dragged us out here early in the morning," she grumbled, long fur fluffed out against the cold.

"You didn't have to come fishing with me, you know," Nightstorm shot back.

"You was the one who decided no cat should go out on their own for too long with a possible murderer in the loose," Tigerflame pointed out.

Nightstorm sighed. "Whatever."

She continued staring at the water in front of her.

"He's going to be fine," Tigerflame meowed, amber gaze fixed on the water.

"You don't know that," Nightstorm growled.

Tigerflame gave a wry smile. "Trust me, Nightstorm. I've seen my fair share of death before, and Blizzardfrost seems pretty determined to hang on."

Nightstorm pricked her ears as a shadow flitted underneath the water. She slashed her paw through the water, making contact with a slippery blob. She suppressed a shudder, flipping it over onto the bank and giving it a quick killing bite.

A dead, silver eye, stared back at her, as if it could see into the very depths of her soul. She shuddered.

"Hey, you caught one!" Tigerflame glanced at her catch. "Finally."

Nightstorm tried not to look at the eye. "Yeah. It's creepy, though."

Nightstorm shook out her pelt. "Come on, let's get back to camp."

She bent down, gripping the slippery fish in her jaw before turning in the direction of camp. It immediately slid out of her grip.

Tigerflame snorted as it landed on the ground with a 'plop'.

"I'm not used to carrying such slippery prey," Nightstorm mumbled, picking it up again and ensuring that it was secure before moving forward.

Nightstorm and Tigerflame padded towards camp in silence, the birds above their heads tweeting in the trees. A squirrel stared at them, almost mockingly, from a branch too high to reach, clutching a nut in its mouth. They ducked into camp.

"What do you want me to do now?" Her tortoiseshell companion asked.

Nightstorm blinked, surprised. "You could go and see if the apprentices need any help with training? Or wait for me and go out hunting again, I guess?"

"I'll wait for you," Tigerflame offered, sitting down at the edge of the clearing.

Nightstorm nodded before turning towards the medicine den, depositing the fish on the fresh kill pile as she went. She ducked into the den, eyes adjusting to the dim light. Dawnbreeze was sat next to Blizzardfrost's nest, presumably changing his wound dressing.

"Hello Dawnbreeze, how's-" Nightstorm broke off as a second pair of eyes stared at her from the nest.

"B-Blizzardfrost? You're awake?"

"What does it look like?" was the grumbled response.

"Blizzardfrost!" Nightstorm bounded forward, purring. "How are you?"

"Fine. Well, as fine as I can be when something tore into my side and caused me to bang my head," Blizzardfrost replied.

"You mean you don't know what happened?" Nightstorm asked.

"I know what happened, I just don't *remember* it," Blizzardfrost scowled.

"You'll probably remember it eventually, though," Dawnbreeze pointed out, looking up from where she was peeling off a bunch of leaves from Blizzardfrost's fur.

Blizzardfrost shrugged, then winced. "Maybe."

Nightstorm sat down. "Are you hungry?"

"Not right now," the grey tabby sighed, resting his chin on his paws. "Although, is that fish I smell?"

Nightstorm pricked her ears. "Yes! I caught one!"

"Oh, really? Took you long enough," Blizzardfrost meowed, lifting his chin off his paws. "What fish was it?"

"I don't know. It had grey scales and a creepy silver eye," Nightstorm described.

Blizzardfrost snorted. "That doesn't narrow it down very much."

He shifted uncomfortably as Dawnbreeze put some new leaves on his wound. Nightstorm suddenly became aware of Tigerflame's gaze searing into her back from outside the den.

"Anyway, I better go now. Tigerflame's waiting for me to go hunting."

"Oh," Blizzardfrost's ears drooped slightly. "That's fine."

"I'll come and see you later," Nightstorm reassured, touching her nose to the top of his head. "I'm glad you're awake."

"Thanks for coming to visit me," Blizzardfrost mewed quietly. "And well done for catching the fish."

"See you later!" Nightstorm purred, trotting out of the den.

Tigerflame padded over to her from where she'd been waiting, studying Nightstorm's face. "So, he's awake?"

Nightstorm nodded in response.

"Not to say I told you so, but I did say he was going to be fine,"Tigerflame pointed out.

Nightstorm shrugged. "He doesn't remember what happened though, and the wound still looks pretty bad."

Tigerflame briefly touched her nose to Nightstorm's fur. "Blizzardfrost will make it. Trust me."

Nightstorm pondered those words as she prowled through the forest next to Tigerflame, in search of prey. Two simple yet powerful words, but Nightstorm now felt less conflicted over the answer as she had been previously. Tigerflame may have had a ... troublesome past, but she seemed like she was trying to put that behind her.

Maybe Tigerflame was deserving of trust after all.

Chapter 29

"What's the last thing you remember?" Dawnbreeze asked patiently, sitting next to Blizzardfrost with her tail curled neatly over her paws.

It was the next day, and Blizzardfrost seemed no close to remembering what had happened than yesterday.

"I remember... A trout," Blizzardfrost eventually meowed, shifting in his nest slightly.

"Was there anything significant about this trout?" Dawnbreeze asked.

"Of course there wasn't! It was a fish!" Blizzardfrost snapped, then sighed. "I remember picking it up to go back to camp. That's it."

Dawnbreeze tilted her head. "So... Snow asked you to go fishing with him?"

Blizzardfrost shrugged. "Look, I don't know. Okay?"

"That's alright. You'll remember eventually," Dawnbreeze meowed brightly. "Anyway, you should probably get some rest."

Blizzardfrost narrowed his eyes. "Don't treat me like a kit."

Dawnbreeze rolled her eyes. "I'm treating you like a cat who got brutally attacked by something and nearly died. So get some rest."

Blizzardfrost scowled before curling up, and Dawnbreeze shook her head before turning to Nightstorm.

"Honestly, *toms*," she muttered, trotting out of the den.

Nightstorm followed, holding in a laugh. "That's Blizzardfrost for you."

Dawnbreeze smiled, leaning down to pick up a squirrel from the fresh kill pile. "Do you want to share-"

She was cut off as Tigerflame burst into camp, the two apprentices following in her wake.

"Nightstorm!" She shouted, looking around the camp before the tortoiseshell she cat's gaze landed on her.

Tigerflame bounded over with a panicked look in her eyes, fur dishevelled.

"Rogues...Border ... Threat," she huffed, trying to catch her breath.

"Wait, what?" Nightstorm asked. "Slow down, I can't understand you."

"There is a group of rogues setting up a territory next to ours. The problem is.. well, I..." For once, the she cat seemed to be struggling for words. "I know them. They were a part of my old group."

Nightstorm sighed. "And let me guess, they can't be trusted?"

Tigerflame nodded.

Hazelpaw bounced excitedly from where she had snuck over, next to Tigerflame. "Ooo, does that mean we get to battle!?"

Nightstorm narrowed her eyes. "The prospect of battle is not an exciting one, Hazelpaw, especially not with a group of rogues. They have no code, no morals, and they don't hesitate to kill."

"Okay, okay, calm down. What have rogues ever done to you, anyway?" Hazelpaw asked in an annoyingly arrogant tone.

"They killed my parents."

There was an awkward silence.

"Anyway, my point is, I doubt these rogues are any different, considering that they come from Tigerflame's old group." Nightstorm shook out her pelt. "I'll go and wait on the border to

find out their intentions."

Tigerflame frowned. "Are you sure about that? I *just* said that they aren't trustworthy."

Nightstorm sighed. "I know, but if they're staying in their own territory, then they probably aren't looking to start a fight just yet. It's best to find out their intentions now then later."

Dawnbreeze nodded. "Nightstorm's probably right. But you can't go on your own; take someone with you."

Tigerflame sighed. "Emberheart and Shadowstrike are out hunting, Blizzardfrost is in the medicine den, the apprentices are too young... I'll go."

"You sure? I thought you said they were from your old group," Nightstorm checked.

Tigerflame huffed. "I know. But hopefully they'll have broken off from it, like me, and we can find some common ground. Besides, if it comes to a fight, I know all of their weak points."

The grin the large she cat gave afterwards caused Nightstorm to shiver.

"Absolutely not. If you get into a fight, you run," Dawnbreeze meowed firmly, looking them both hard in the eye. "If you two get injured, there's only two warriors and two apprentices left to hunt."

Tigerflame scowled. "Fine."

Nightstorm followed the tortoiseshell out of camp, meowing a quick 'goodbye' to Dawnbreeze over her shoulder. If she was being honest, she didn't know what she would do if she got into a fight. Dawnbreeze raised a good point in favour of fleeing, but it would also make them look weak and the rogues would be more likely to attack sooner rather than later. However, if they fought, a show of strength would put the rogues in their place.

"Hellof, youf two!" She was brought out of her musings by a cheery, if somewhat muffled, greeting from Emberheart, who held a bird in

his mouth.

Shadowstrike was next to him, holding a mouse.

"I thought you were meant to be training the apprentices, Tigerflame," Shadowstrike asked, dropping her mouse to the ground.

"We got... Sidetracked." Tigerflame glanced at Nightstorm, waiting for her to explain the situation.

"There's some rogues setting up on the border and we're going to find out their intentions. If you want all the details, talk to either the apprentices or Dawnbreeze," Nightstorm explained.

"Wellf, mayfe they'rfe frienly rogues," Emberheart meowed optimistically, still clutching the bird in his mouth.

"Do you want me to come with you? I can wait behind a bush or something, just in case you need some backup?" Shadowstrike offered, unsheathing her claws.

Nightstorm nodded. "Yes, thank you."

Shadowstrike nudged her mouse over to Emberheart. "You can take that back to camp."

Emberheart nodded, bending down to try and grab the mouse as well. "Goofl luck!"

Nightstorm and Tigerflame continued on their way through the trees, Shadowstrike following behind them. Tigerflame gave a bit more detail to Shadowstrike on the way.

"So... You know them? And they're not going to be nice neighbours?" Shadowstrike summarised.

Tigerflame nodded.

"Splendid."

They came to a halt at the border. Shadowstrike nodded to them

both.

"Good luck." The dark she cat meowed, before melting into the shadows.

"I guess now we just wai-" Nightstorm was cut off as pawsteps sounded from the other side of the border.

"Well, we didn't have to wait long," Tigerflame muttered under her breath.

Nightstorm stood to her full height, raising her tail. "Whoever you are, come out, and state your business."

A ginger tom padded out from behind the trees, green eyes glowing. He stopped short when he realised who it was.

Tigerflame's and Nightstorm's mouths simultaneously fell open.

"You was that tom who kept us trapped in Twolegplace!" Nightstorm growled, unsheathing her claws.

"Snarl!?" Tigerflame exclaimed. "What in the name of the stars are you doing here?"

"Woah, hold on. You-" he pointed a claw at Nightstorm. "-caused me to get kicked out of the group. And, Tiger, you gave me hell as a kit. So give me one reason why I shouldn't shred your pelts where you stand."

"Because I say so."